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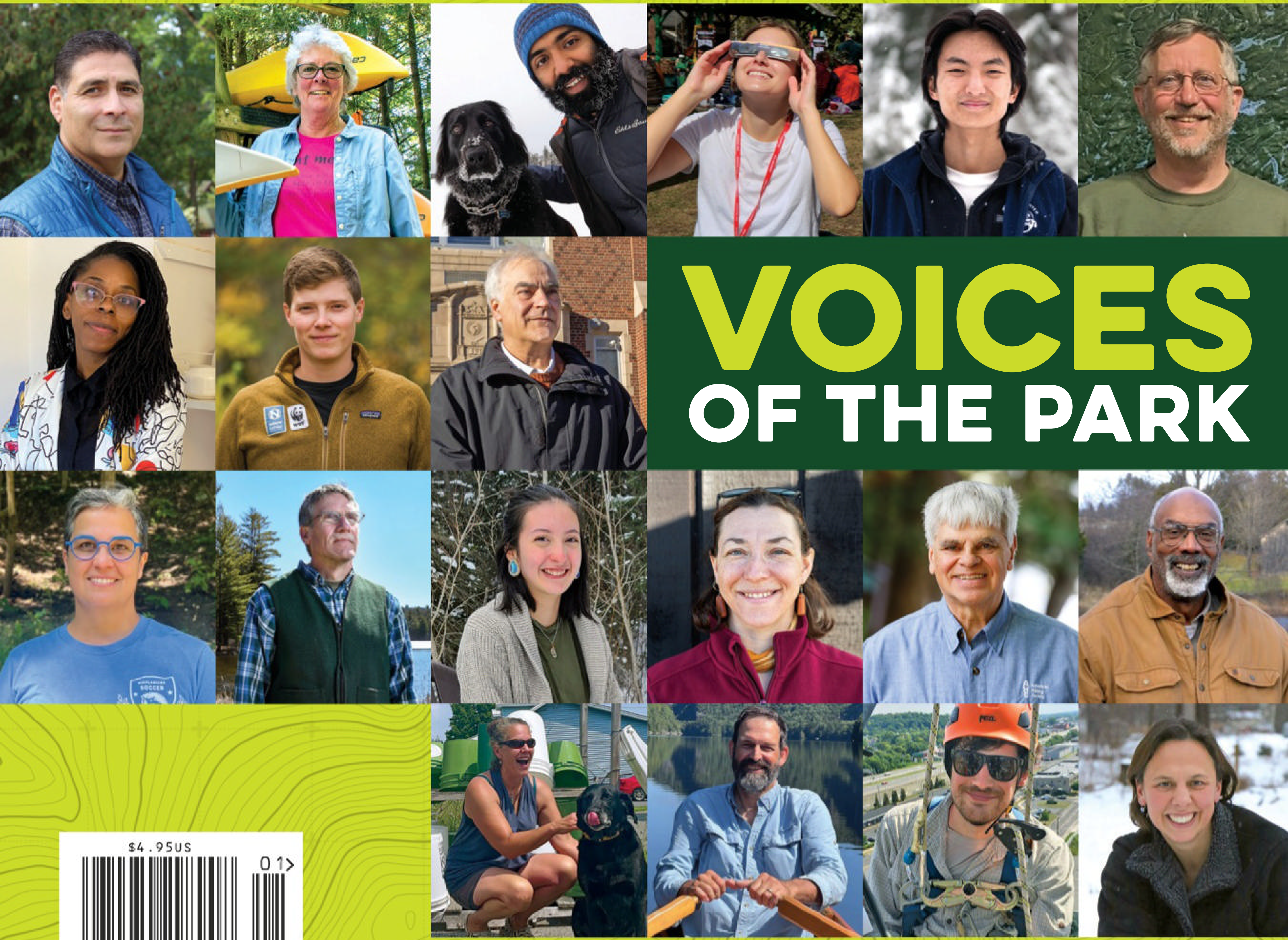

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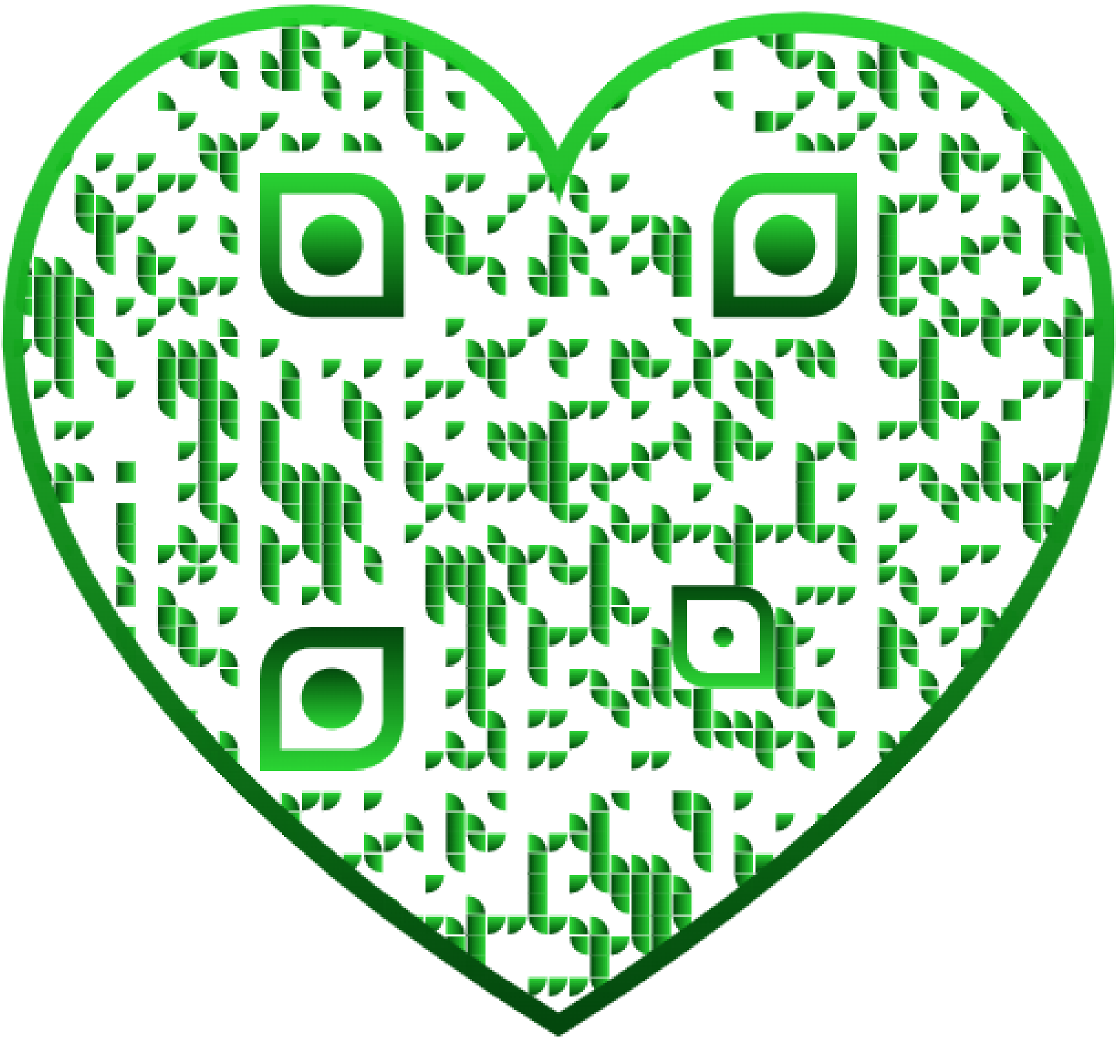

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Cover: These people are in the Adirondack Park movement for education and environmental protection. Read about them inside.

Above: The aurora borealis over Brant Lake, May 10, 2024, 10:14 p.m.
Photo by Carl Heilman II

HENDRICKSON'S ADIRONDACK ACREAGE IS UP TO DESIGNEES

BY JAMES M. ODATO

Before he died in Saratoga Springs last August, John F. Hendrickson decided to let his older brother handle the future of his multimillion-dollar estate, including 36,000 acres near Long Lake that are among the most desired private holdings in the Adirondack Park.

Filed in Palm Beach County, Florida Oct. 31, Hendrickson's will directs Edward Hendrickson, 62, who lives in Alaska, to make key decisions.

John Hendrickson named his brother and Carolyn Steuer as his representatives but designated Edward Hendrickson to have final say. Steuer is a former employee of Marylou Whitney, John Hendrickson's wife, who died in July 2019.

Steuer received a Saratoga Springs residence as part of millions of dollars Whitney willed to friends and family, her will states. The heiress' file in the Saratoga County Surrogate's Court listed her assets at $158 million with her husband inheriting most.

Thomas W. Miller, lawyer for John Hendrickson, his widow and her previous and deceased husband Cornelius "Sonny" Vanderbilt Whitney, said a resolution on what will happen to the acreage known as Whitney Park in the Adirondacks could unfold in 2025.

John Hendrickson speaks at the unveiling of the Marylou Whitney Way sign at the Marylou Whitney Pavilion at the Saratoga Race Course. TIMES UNION / LORI VAN BUREN

He said Hendrickson, 59, had expressed what he wanted done with his Adirondack holdings. "It will be disclosed," Miller said. "I'm well aware there's a lot of interest in it, but I can't share anything."

The will, signed in Lexington, Kentucky in November 2020, marked the estimated value of Hendrickson's estate at $100 million. It also set down his wishes to be buried next to his wife at Green Ridge Cemetery in Saratoga Springs.

Marie Louise "Marylou" Whitney Hendrickson was a major philanthropist. She had inherited a fortune from her late husband, including vast tracks of forested land, exclusive camps and dwellings and shorefront in the Adirondacks.

Almost 30 years ago, New York purchased a key Whitney tract, almost 15,000 acres around Little Tupper Lake. The acquisition led to the state's creation of the William C. Whitney Wilderness area, which includes Lake Lila.

John Hendrickson was displeased with the state's stewardship and set out to sell the acreage of nearby Whitney Park, with multiple lakes and ponds. He listed it for sale for $180 million and later considered seeking the right to subdivide the property into 11 parcels, about 3,200 acres each, envisioning sales to fetch $238 million. The property contains the 17-bedroom Camp Deerlands overlooking Little Forked Lake.

Hendrickson listed another 58 acres, Camp on a Point on Little Tupper Lake in Hamilton County. It was for sale at $5.25 million but the price was lowered after Hendrickson died.

State conservation leaders have eyed Whitney Park for years. It is considered "a high priority land conservation parcel" in the state's Open Space Plan. A Department of Environmental Conservation communications official said the DEC does not comment on potential land negotiations.

This fall, eight conservation organizations wrote to Gov. Kathy Hochul urging her to find a way to obtain the Whitney property in the Adirondacks. ■

BIG TUPPER EYED FOR BACKCOUNTRY SKIING

BY JAMES M. ODATO

The former alpine ski center known as Big Tupper returned to private hands after Franklin County accepted the $650,000 high bid from a pair of friends who immediately began proposing future skiing there. (See page 52.)

Winning bidders Josh Parnes, left, and Martin Schapira stand on Tupper Lake with the site of Big Tupper in the distance.
PHOTO COURTESY OF MARTIN SCHAPIRA

The winners in the November tax foreclosure auction, Martin Schapira and business partner Josh Parnes of New Jersey, began plans for reopening the site on Mount Morris for public recreation. They are mulling options for the roughly 450 acres, including back-country skiing combined with at least one reopened lift, while aspiring to restart downhill skiing.

"I'm happy. It's finally moving on and let's see what comes of it," said Nedd Sparks, the county legislator from Tupper Lake. The board unanimously approved the Big Tupper bid as well as other high bids for three adjacent parcels, two of which also went to Schapira and Parnes, who own a home and property on County Line Island in Tupper Lake.

Schapira, who designs homes and commercial spaces, said he and Parnes are researching skiing and hiking trail options on Big Tupper. The alpine facility closed years ago. "I would like to put together a well-done backcountry skiing system," Schapira said.

He said he has been seeking input from some of the "best back-country skiers in the Adirondack Park."

County and town of Tupper Lake representatives say they are open to joining as partners in developing the mountain for public use but await details of a plan.

"As long as there's a good idea and there's momentum behind it, good things happen," said Jeremy Evans, head of Franklin County's economic development agency.

Tupper Lake Supervisor Rick Dattola said the new owners want to do something positive for the community and perhaps the county and town can help. "We ain't got no money. I got people coming in my offices, they can't pay their school taxes," Dattola said. "We're in the early stages." ■

AGENCY APPROVES BARTON PLAN

BY GWENDOLYN CRAIG

A sixth-generation, family-owned garnet mining operation in Johnsburg and Indian Lake received Adirondack Park Agency approval for its expansion plan. The plan allows the hard rock mine to operate for another 66 years.

The agency board voted 8-0 for the Barton Mines permit that has been in the works for three years. The application received extensive support from past and present mine workers and local government leaders. But neighbors and environmental groups pushed back and unsuccessfully demanded an adjudicatory hearing to gather facts.

It was "one of the most technically complex and resource impactful private land use applications to come before the APA," said David Gibson, managing partner of Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve. The mine still needs a Department of Environmental Conservation mined land reclamation permit.

"We're obviously pleased and delighted with the approval of the permit by the park agency," said Randy Rapple, Barton's CEO. "We look forward to the review by the DEC in the coming weeks and being able to continue our operations in the North Country as we have for the past 146 years."

The agency's board, with barely enough members for a quorum, went along with the business' expansion despite demands from various parties for greater review.

The board's park ecology chair, Zoë Smith, was absent due to a broken ankle. Dan Wilt, the agency's regulatory committee chair, was on vacation. Its Department of State representative, Matthew Tebo, tuned in remotely to the meeting, and was able to vote. And the agency remains without one of its in-park board members since January 2023 when Andrea Hogan resigned.

The agency's meeting grew to standing room when the board heard from Corrie Magee, an environmental program specialist with the APA, on the mine expansion. About a dozen representatives of the mine attended.

Environmental groups have been perplexed that the APA decided the application was complete, pointing to a number of unanswered questions the agency had in its fourth notice of incomplete application.

An adjudicatory hearing is the only way the APA can deny an application. ■

ON ADIRONDACKEXPLORER.ORG

Brian Greene took over in the fall of 2024 as the executive director of the **Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program**, which works to prevent and manage invasive species. Greene, who had previously worked as the group's aquatic specialist, said the park is gradually losing natural protections.

Gov. Kathy Hochul vetoed a **wildlife crossing** bill in December, disappointing Adirondack environmentalists. The bill, supported by Assembly members **Billy Jones**, D-Chateaugay, and **Matthew Simpson**, R-Lake George, called for state assessments of roadways to establish crossing sites that might reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions.

NYCO Minerals in Lewis wants the state to authorize a new way to extract tons of wollastonite in a year-round, 24-hours-per-day underground work schedule that includes weekday blasting. The company seeks **expanded hours and a change in mineral extraction** from above ground to 354 feet deeper than its current permit allows.

FROM TOP: PHOTO COURTESY OF ADIRONDACK PARK INVASIVE PLANT PROGRAM, GORDON ELLMERS, NANCIE BATTAGLIA

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OUR MISSION:
Through its news reporting and analysis, the nonprofit Adirondack Explorer furthers the wise stewardship, public enjoyment for all, community vitality and lasting protection of the Adirondack Park.

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BRIEF BIO

JOHN T. "DOC" WARD

Age: 67

Birthplace: Massena

Residence: Saranac Lake

Occupation: Artist

How I Got Here:
I went to college to be an FBI agent and studied pre-law and criminal justice at Niagara University but a freeze on federal hiring curtailed that. I worked midnight shifts as a security guard and industrial firefighter at Alcoa in Massena. I went back to school to study teaching at St. Lawrence University and art education at SUNY Plattsburgh and illustration at Syracuse University. I illustrated many books and magazines. I moved to Saranac Lake in 1985 to become an art teacher at the Saranac Lake High School. Students gave me the nickname "Doc."

Background/accomplishments:
I taught art for 31 years until retiring in 2015 and remain a portrait painter. I have received numerous awards, national and international. My paintings have hung all over the world, including the U.S. Embassy in Swaziland, Africa, representing American art. I am currently a U.S. Coast Guard artist creating artwork to document the mission of the Coast Guard for the Pentagon. Since 2016, I have been the head ice carver for the Saranac Lake Winter Carnival Ice Palace (see page 44).

Favorite Adirondack adventures/outings:
Hiking and taking my two-year- old grandson for a boat ride, particularly in my kayak.

Memorable outdoor experience:
Recently I came nose to nose with a black bear while riding my mountain bike early one morning on a trail near my home.

Why I love the Adirondacks:
I love its history, its beauty and its people. I am a mountain man at heart.

If I oversaw the park:
I would protect all aspects of it and preserve it for my two grandchildren to enjoy. ■

Loving loons

Center founder shifts to science, welcomes new director

BY ZACHARY MATSON

Dorothy Waldt near the loon center office in Saranac Lake. PHOTO BY ZACHARY MATSON

During a paddle with her husband from Church Pond to Osgood Pond, Dorothy Waldt heard the distinctive call of a loon. But there was no bird in sight. As they emerged from a narrow canal, the loon showed itself, a sentinel of Adirondack wilderness.

"There's something romantic and mysterious about it," Waldt said in a recent interview. "I don't know that there is another bird call that gives you that feeling."

Starting next month, Waldt, who spent her career helping large companies fill executive leadership positions, will be working full time on behalf of Adirondack loons when she takes over as executive director of the Adirondack Center for Loon Conservation.

The center's founder and longtime leader Nina Schoch will take on a new position as the center's director of science and conservation, freeing her from the administrative duties of managing a nonprofit.

"I will have more time to contribute to our research studies, management efforts, development of our educational exhibits and outreach programs," Schoch said. "Dorothy has an excellent background in leadership, business, program and financial management, and familiarity with the Adirondacks."

After spending most of their lives in New Jersey, Waldt and her husband purchased a home in Saranac Lake in late 2020 and relocated full time later. She worked as an executive recruiter in the retail sector for over 20 years, running her own consultancy and helping large businesses fill important leadership vacancies.

"I get to use that experience in an organization with a beautiful foundation that is beloved in the community and throughout the Adirondacks," she said.

Waldt said she has always been committed to volunteering and community service. After 9/11, she worked to ensure relief organizations would increase payments to displaced renters, many who were not insured. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she helped organize deliveries of 7,000 care kits to workers at a pair of hospitals.

Thinking about the world her two children will inherit, Waldt said, she grew more interested in supporting environmental and wildlife causes.

She said she wants to increase the loon center's engagement with students and schools, expand research into what loons can teach us about the health of the larger ecosystem and reach audiences in more corners of the Adirondack Park.

Schoch said the leadership change is part of a succession plan to prepare the organization for her eventual retirement and ensure its continued work.

Besides monitoring and rescuing loons, Schoch will be setting up the Adirondack Wildlife Health Institute with SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry's Adirondack Ecological Center in Newcomb.

The proposed facility would be a place to care for injured wildlife, while expanding training and education for rehabilitators, students and veterinarians. Starting with loons, it could grow to support other species in the Adirondacks, according to a proposal summary.

"I hope the loon center will become a valuable resource for the public and policymakers to understand the importance of continuing to protect the environment through the lives of Adirondack loons," Schoch said.

"I don't know anyone who doesn't love loons," Waldt said. ■

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Precision matters when it comes to the SLMP

When a word or a phrase creates misunderstanding, we hear from readers.

So, we're sympathetic to the editing task facing the Adirondack Park Agency as it updates the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan (SLMP), which guides how the Department of Environmental Conservation manages state lands in the park. The land classifications in the master plan specify which activities are allowed in different areas, helping to protect the natural resources and unique character that make our region unmatched.

SLMP updates, made every five years, can be downright mundane. Sometimes paragraphs are added to reflect new science or understanding, but a good deal of the edits clean up wording, or change names of board members, executive directors and governors.

This year is different. The updates proposed are more than housekeeping. The APA says they are needed to comply with the U.S. Americans with Disabilities Act. The APA needs to be careful that in its wordsmithing it doesn't inadvertently open the park to motor vehicle use on lands that are classified to receive the highest ecological protections.

Certainly, the changes are well-intentioned: We all want people with disabilities to be able to enjoy the Adirondacks as fully as possible. Appropriately, the classifications permit wheelchairs in all parts of the park where pedestrians can go. But there are questions about the use of so-called "other power driven mobility devices"—OPDMDs—which run on batteries or fuel or other engines, but are not wheelchairs per se.

These vehicles might include golf carts, Segways or ATVs. Because they sometimes provide access for people with mobility issues, the DEC currently allows their use in even sensitive areas by permit on a case-by-case basis. Before the DEC approves a permit application, officials review the safety, weight and speed of vehicles, among other criteria. That's been the process for about 13 years.

Could the state be opening the wilderness to Segways and other vehicles? ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

In its proposed master plan changes, the APA has added OPDMDs to the section pertaining to wheelchairs, but it has also specifically excluded them under the definition of motor vehicles. It does that by adding to its definition of a motor vehicle the clarification that it "does not include wheelchairs or other power-driven mobility devices."

Clarity here is essential. The SLMP under review defines a wheelchair as a "manually operated or power-driven device designed primarily for use by a person with a mobility disability." It defines OPDMDs as "any mobility device powered by batteries, fuel, or other engines — whether or not designed primarily for use by individuals with mobility disabilities."

Motorized access is prohibited in wilderness, primitive or canoe areas. That has been the case since the SLMP was written 52 years ago. By moving to exclude OPDMDs from the definition of motor vehicles, the APA is blurring lines in a way that could allow for broad interpretation of what is allowed in these restrictive classifications.

The DEC says the updates simply clarify the definition of wheelchairs. But a clarification that causes confusion fails to meet its intent. Why not be precise? For the purpose of the SLMP, OPDMDs should be included as motor vehicles, with a note that they are an accepted use only by people with qualifying disabilities, and who obtain a special permit through DEC.

Other public agencies have been able to clarify their rules around OPDMD use in the most vulnerable areas. California policy, for example, includes a chart of approved devices and routes.

New York's Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation adopted a clear policy in 2022. It includes a stipulation that a user may be asked for credible assurance of their need for the motorized device, and it defines in which land classifications these devices are allowed. OPDMDs with gas-powered engines are prohibited in most state park areas.

The APA needs to get this right. There's no rush here. DEC can continue issuing permits as it has for the last decade while the APA reviews hundreds of public comments and carefully considers these changes. In the interest of transparency, and with an eye on the potential effect on the forest preserve, the public should have another opportunity to see and comment on revisions.

Anything that claims some motor vehicles are not actually motor vehicles shouldn't get through the APA board, whose mission is to protect the public and private resources of the park.

Before passing the document to Gov. Kathy Hochul for her signature, the APA must make sure that the updates provide better access and uphold the protections that attract people of all abilities from all over the world. As written, these changes weaken protection of the spectacular beauty and unspoiled nature of the Adirondacks. ■

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Disliking the ash borers

Thank you for this article (“Rooting for the Warren County wasps” November/December). My property just outside North Creek has hundreds of dead ash trees. This saddens me. Firewood for the rest of my life, but the loss of a beautiful tree.

Patrick Benard
Manhattan

RELEASING WASPS TO FIGHT BORERS
LEARNING FROM ALICE GREEN
TRACKING THE ACCESSIBILITY MOVEMENT
THE NONPROFIT VOICE OF THE PARK
Adirondack EXPLORER
NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2024
BEARS AND US CAN WE COEXIST?
+ SPECIAL REPORT: BUILDING STORM DEFENSES

With the death of ash trees, we are losing important forest community members. On my property in northern St. Lawrence County, I have mostly black ash that have been infected for three to four years now. These trees fill an area with standing water for part of the year. I am able to cut many for firewood but at some point, they will become brittle and dangerous to cut down.

Then, I can only leave them to rot. I do have some younger trees, too young to be attacked by the borer, and I am going to be optimistic that the parasitic wasps spread in time to help protect the younger generation.

James A. Tryon
Chase Mills

> ***“The gap in opportunities in school correlates highly with outcomes in life. Poverty and inequality are at the root. But it doesn’t mean there’s nothing you can do.”*** —Regent Roger Catania (see page 38)

Rate the trails to design for resilience

I would like to see the state implement a trail rating system, similar to how ski resorts classify their trails—ranging from “easy” to “extremely difficult” (“Making resilient woodland paths” November/December).

As an avid hiker, I value the wilderness experience that the Adirondacks are known for.

When climbing mountains, the presence of crushed stone, rock stairways, boardwalks, bridges, wooden stairs and handrails detracts from that natural, rugged adventure many of us seek.

While I understand the need for trail modifications to reduce environmental impact and increase accessibility, I feel these infrastructure improvements should be limited to easy and moderate trails.

By preserving the difficulty and natural state of the hard and extreme trails, we can maintain the challenge that experienced hikers look for, while also minimizing long-term erosion caused by increased foot traffic

Prioritizing sustainable design on lower-rated trails would also help reduce costs and ensure the wild character of the more difficult routes remain intact for future generations.

Shane Holmes
Long Lake

Get rid of old trails

I’ve seen a lot of hiking and biking trails done by Steve Ovitt. He has the gift. He is a master at grade reversal.

I’d like to see the Department of Environmental Conservation abandon some of the really bad trails that follow the fall line and make some new intelligently designed trails. They spend too much time and money putting Band-Aids on old trails that are too steep.

Also the trailless high peak trails are basically just trails without markers. The really bad ones like Cliff, Gray and Esther should just have well-designed trails built up them.

Steve Mackey
Glens Falls

Bear deaths are cruel

Bears should not have been put down— consideration and respect for all (“Losing black bears to euthanization” November/December). Do not feed them or leave food around, including open garbage cans and plastic bags.

So cruel—could have tranquilized the bears and relocated them deep in the woods.

Unless the bear attacks. That's a different story.

Glen Doughten
Boonville

Buck mountains (plural)

Just finished the article on the Buck mountains (“My several Bucks” September/October) What a fantastic way to note a correction! Funny, informative, and well researched. Thank you!

Allan Berry
Brockport

Correction to November/December chart: In 2024, Assemblyman Matt Simpson voted in favor of the wildlife crossing act after voting against moving it forward in committee in 2023.

The biggest draws

Mill, hatchery, snow gunners and public water supplies top the list of permitted water users

BY ZACHARY MATSON

Whiteface Mountain's website the Monday before Thanksgiving promised skiers a Black Friday deal: Snow. At least on the slopes. Conditions may apply.

"Our snowmakers will be hard at work," the state-operated ski resort teased in its conditions update.

Ever since Lake Placid in 1980 hosted the first Winter Olympics to use artificial snow, the ski center's workers have supplemented Mother Nature with a firehose of manmade snow. The superficial snow, produced in a complex maze of pumps, pipes and powerful snow guns, is fueled by the West Branch of the Ausable River.

The snowmaking operation, intensive in labor, energy and water, levels out inconsistent snowfall to help meet visitor expectations, entice international competitions and maintain a centerpiece of the region's culture—as scientists lament the gradual "demise of winter" in the Adirondacks. An agreement with the state Department of Environmental Conservation allows the Olympic Regional Development Authority to pump 6,000 gallons of water per minute from the river, with restrictions at lower flows. In recent years the ski center used about as much water during the winter months as Lake Placid's public water supply uses throughout the year.

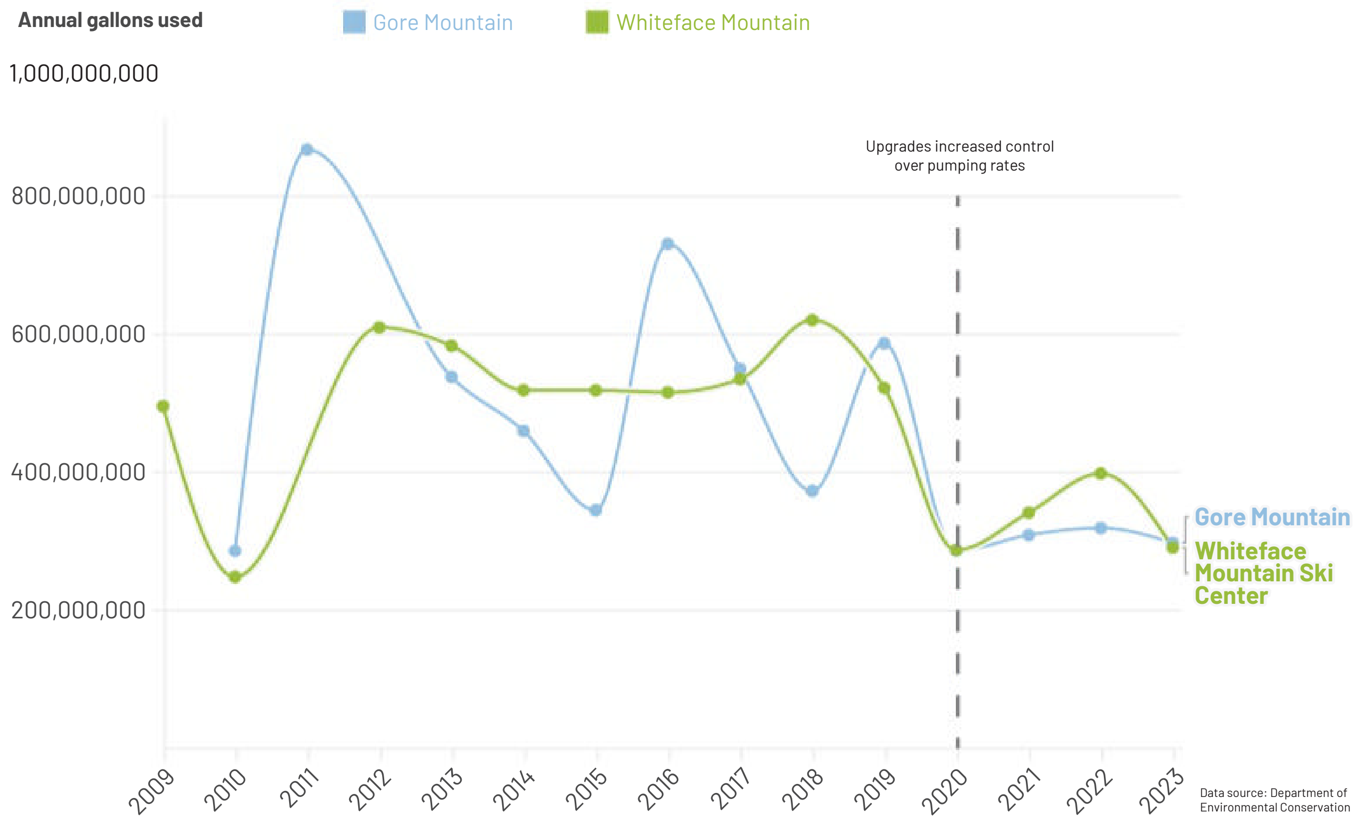
"We wouldn't be in business if we didn't have it," said Aaron Kellett, ORDA's general manager of Whiteface Mountain.

Whiteface is just one of the entities in the Adirondack Park operating thanks to abundant water. The park's vast water resources support the business of snowmaking, public water supplies and, especially, paper production.

Nearly 100 permitted water users with the capacity to withdraw at least 100,000 gallons per day combined to pump over 12 billion gallons in 2022 from lakes, streams, rivers and natural underground stores.

Olympic Regional Development Authority snowmaking

The state's two Adirondack Park ski mountains, Gore and Whiteface, are the largest recreational water users in the region.



Data source: Department of Environmental Conservation

One user, the Sylvamo Paper Mill in Ticonderoga, long known as International Paper, used about half of that total tonnage, according to an analysis of monthly water withdrawal reports submitted to DEC from 2009 to 2023. The mill employs around 600 people.

The state-operated Adirondack Fish Hatchery cycled over 1 billion gallons of water through the fish-rearing facility each of the past eight years—the second biggest user in the park.

Public water supplies, the next largest category of water use in the region, combined to account for nearly 4 billion gallons pumped in 2022, about one third of the water reported used that year (and still 32% less than the paper mill). The region's public water providers supply drinking water to around 65,000 residents and thousands of annual visitors to the park.

A thirsty paper mill

The Sylvamo mill draws its water from Lake Champlain's southern narrows—each year relying on about 0.08% of the lake's estimated 6.8 trillion gallons of water—and on average releases over 15 million gallons of treated wastewater back to the lake each day.

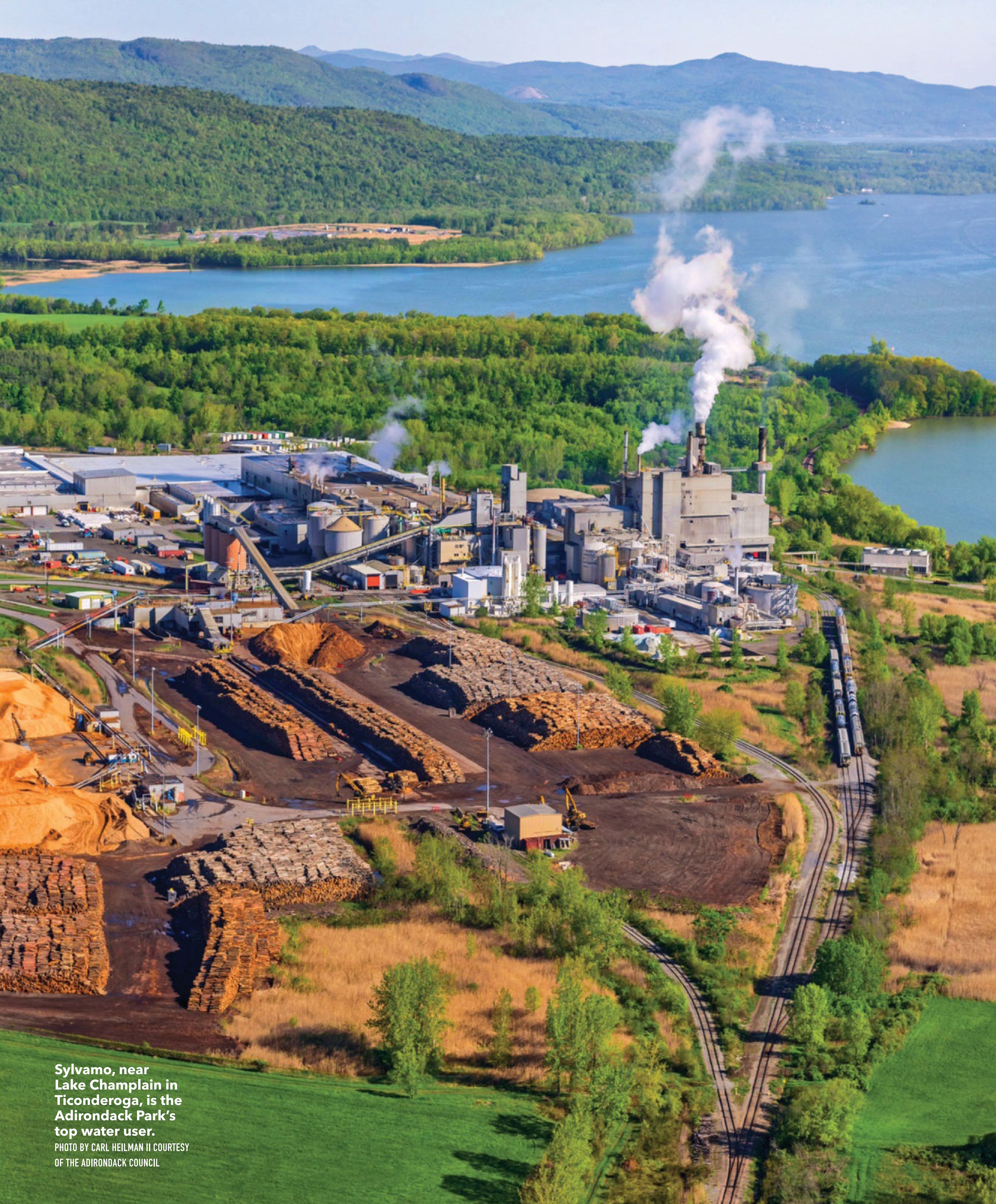
State inspectors consistently noted satisfactory conditions during visits in recent years, according to records, but officials issued the mill violation notices in June 2024 and June 2020, after workers spilled methanol last summer and released wastewater sludge in 2020.

Sylvamo, based in Memphis, Tennessee, declined an interview and facility tour. The company, established as a spinoff of International Paper in 2021, also operates mills in South Carolina, Brazil, France and Sweden.

The company aims to reduce its overall water use 25% by 2030 and create water stewardship plans for all its mills, according to its 2023 annual sustainability report.

But in 2023 Sylvamo increased its water use 7% over its 2019 baseline, according to the company report.

The mill combines water with wood fiber ground and cooked into pulp to make paper.



Sylvamo, near Lake Champlain in Ticonderoga, is the Adirondack Park's top water user.
PHOTO BY CARL HEILMAN II COURTESY OF THE ADIRONDACK COUNCIL

When first combined into so-called “furnish,” the product is 99.5% water. A fast-moving conveyor belt and screen start to draw the water before it is further pressed by heavy rotating cylinders. Finally, a series of dryers evaporates the remaining liquid before the paper is finished, cut to size and packaged for shipping. Without water there is no paper. The mill relies on a complex of artificial wetlands to filter and clean its wastewater before discharging it back to Lake Champlain.

The resource of water

Water has always been central to the Adirondack Park, which was partly established to preserve consistent flows into the state canal system, and its abundance is seen as a compelling draw in the face of diminishing water sources elsewhere.

But will climate change, which scientists predict will mean a mix of increased precipitation and extended dry spells, strain precious water resources in the future? Downstate counties this fall were put under a drought warning, with officials recommending voluntary water conservation and advising public water supplies update drought contingency plans.

Research at Paul Smith’s College led by Curt Stager in 2022 found that climate has and will continue to alter the region’s fragile ecosystem and cultural identity. If the planet continues carbon emissions at current levels, Stager’s team estimated, the Adirondacks could see winters shortened by as much as a month by 2100 as springs arrive earlier and summers lengthen.

Even the best-case scenario projected a gradual decline of winter conditions for the foreseeable future.

On the slopes, shorter winters and fewer cold temperatures will increase pressure on snowmakers. At Whiteface, pumphouse 1 draws water from the Ausable a short distance from the main visitor lodge; the mountain reduced its use in recent years after installing volume controls on the pumps.

Pumphouse 2, though, is the real power center. A control desk there monitors and operates a network of 50 miles of pipes across the mountain. Eight 800-horsepower air compressors supply snow’s second most important ingredient.

ORDA is moving toward greater efficiency with investments in equipment and replacing pipes first installed ahead of the 1980 Olympics. A reservoir would further help the center maximize its snowmaking by providing storage to optimize river flows, Kellett said.

This winter Whiteface is testing use of a snowmaking additive called Snomax, a protein composed of dead organic material that weighs down artificial snow so more of it lands on the slopes. But none of the improvements enable them to make more snow for less water.

“The goal is to make more snow faster, for less money and to reduce our carbon footprint,” Kellett said.

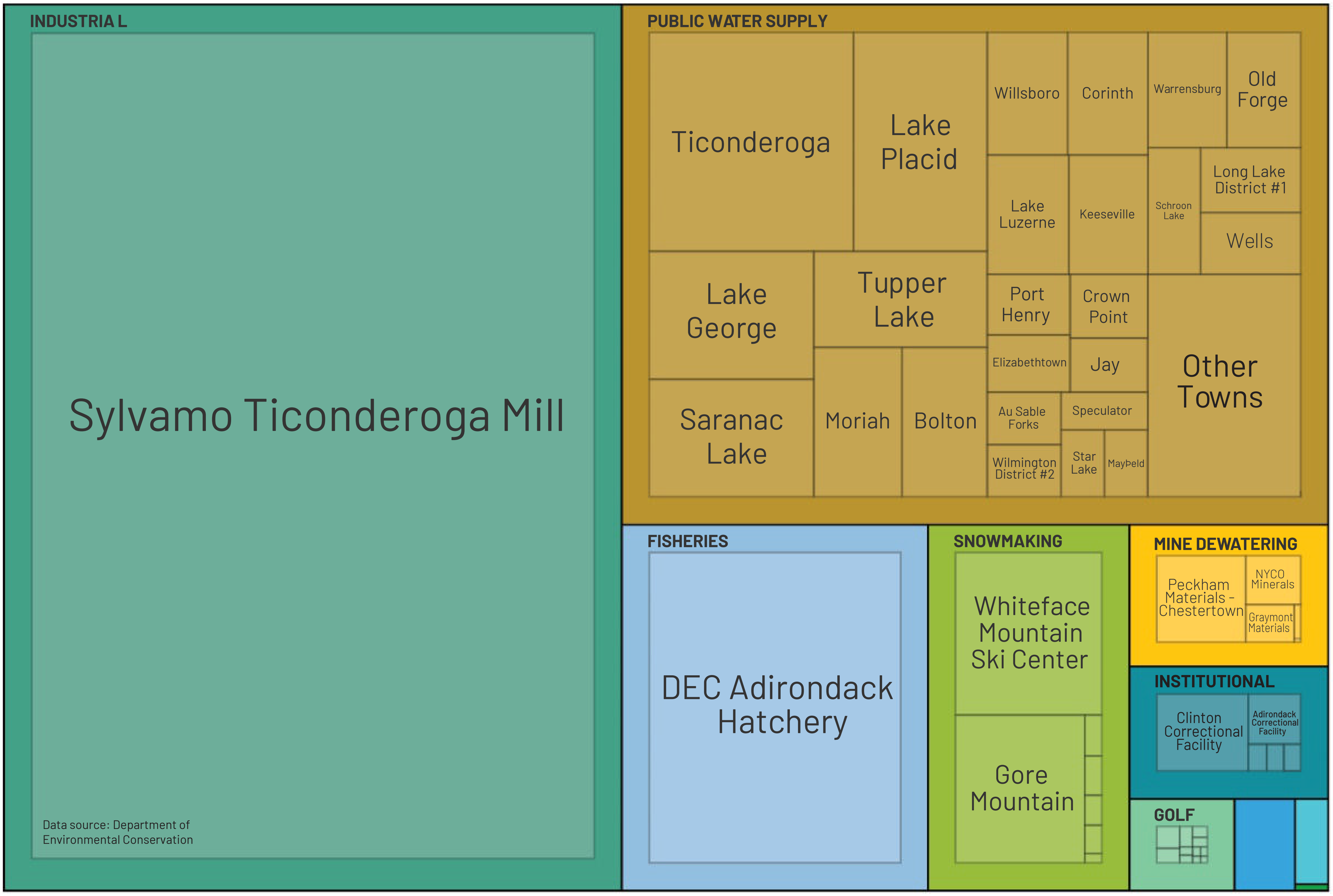
Other permitted water users—a list that excludes the many residents and businesses in the park that rely on well water—include mining operations, state prisons and Adirondack Farms in Peru, the park’s single agricultural operation with a withdrawal permit.

Eleven golf courses in 2022 reported using a combined 100 million gallons of water to keep the greens green.

Clockwise from above left: **Whiteface Mountain draws water from the Ausable River to make artificial snow. Aaron Kellett, general manager of Whiteface Mountain, at a control panel showing the mountain's system of pumps and pipes used in snowmaking. Salmon eggs lie in water drawn from Little Clear Pond at the Adirondack Park’s lone state-operated fish hatchery.** PHOTOS BY ZACHARY MATSON

Water use in the Adirondacks

The former International Paper Mill in Ticonderoga uses about half of the reported water withdrawals in the park. The rest of that use, represented proportionally by the squares below, goes to a mix of public drinking water, state-funded recreation and other purposes. Based on 2022 reported data. Smallest users not labeled.



Data source: Department of Environmental Conservation

Jim Connors, the longtime course manager at Saranac Inn Golf and Country Club, the course with the highest water use reported, said unlike most Adirondack courses Saranac Inn also waters its fairways.

“We only water when we need to,” Connors said. “We only water when there isn’t enough rain.”

The Adirondack Fish Hatchery near Lake Clear, the only state-run hatchery within the blue line, raises all of the Atlantic salmon stocked by the state, as well as endangered round whitefish. Drawing water from Little Clear Pond, which flows through pipes lying beneath the new Adirondack Rail Trail, and a small collection of wells, the hatchery uses about 3 million gallons of water per day.

The steady flow of cold, oxygenated water cycling through incubation trays, raceways and large artificial ponds is essential to raise tens of thousands of fish as they grow to six or seven inches before being stocked across the Adirondacks and the state—over 30,000 pounds of fish a year. To keep the fish healthy, the hatchery’s gravity-fed water system pushes each new gallon of water through the hatchery in a matter of hours. Water in storage ponds cycles out within about 90 minutes.

“The fish need fresh water,” said Matt Jackson, the hatchery manager. “If it’s stagnant, they won’t be happy.”

Like the Whiteface snow that eventually melts and runs back to the Ausable, the water used at the hatchery makes its way back into the watershed. After passing through the hatchery raceways and tanks, it drains to concrete settling ponds, where sediment and nutrients filter out and are removed by hatchery staff.

The hatchery adopted more stringent protocols to address concerns about phosphorus discharging to Upper Saranac Lake, improving its fish food and increasing water sampling. Under its wastewater discharge permit, the hatchery can release 4.1 million gallons of used water a day into Hatchery Brook, which flows to Upper Saranac Lake.

“Everything that comes in goes out,” said Jim Daley, DEC’s superintendent of fish culture. ■

ZACHARY MATSON is an Explorer reporter specializing in water issues.

A running solar show

Adirondack skies screen northern light sequels

BY MIKE LYNCH

At 2:30 a.m. on Thursday, Oct. 11, whitish pillars of light rose into the sky over the barn at Donnelly's Corners in Harrietstown. Rising from northern hardwood forests in Lake Clear, they glowed above the mountains.

In his Jeep, parked at the Upper St. Regis Lake boat launch, amateur photographer John Faltus slept beside his tripod and camera.

An exhausted Faltus had spent most of the night hoping to capture the aurora borealis. At sunset, he hiked Panther Mountain near Tupper Lake. After, he drove north of Saranac Lake, stopping at Glenview in Harrietstown and then proceeded to Vermontville. But clouds covered the sky.

He considered returning home to his warm bed, but by 11 p.m. he took up watch again at Upper St. Regis Lake. With clouds continuing to hover, he took a nap in his Jeep, waking shortly after 3 a.m. With the clouds gone, he photographed greens, reds, and purple in the sky until dawn.

That was the second time that week that Faltus had witnessed the phenomenon. The previous Sunday evening, as he drove back from Old Forge, he enjoyed a show of red lights in the southwestern Adirondacks. That night, the sky was punctuated with a flash of lighting.

Such displays, each memorable and remarkable, are expected to keep rolling in 2025.

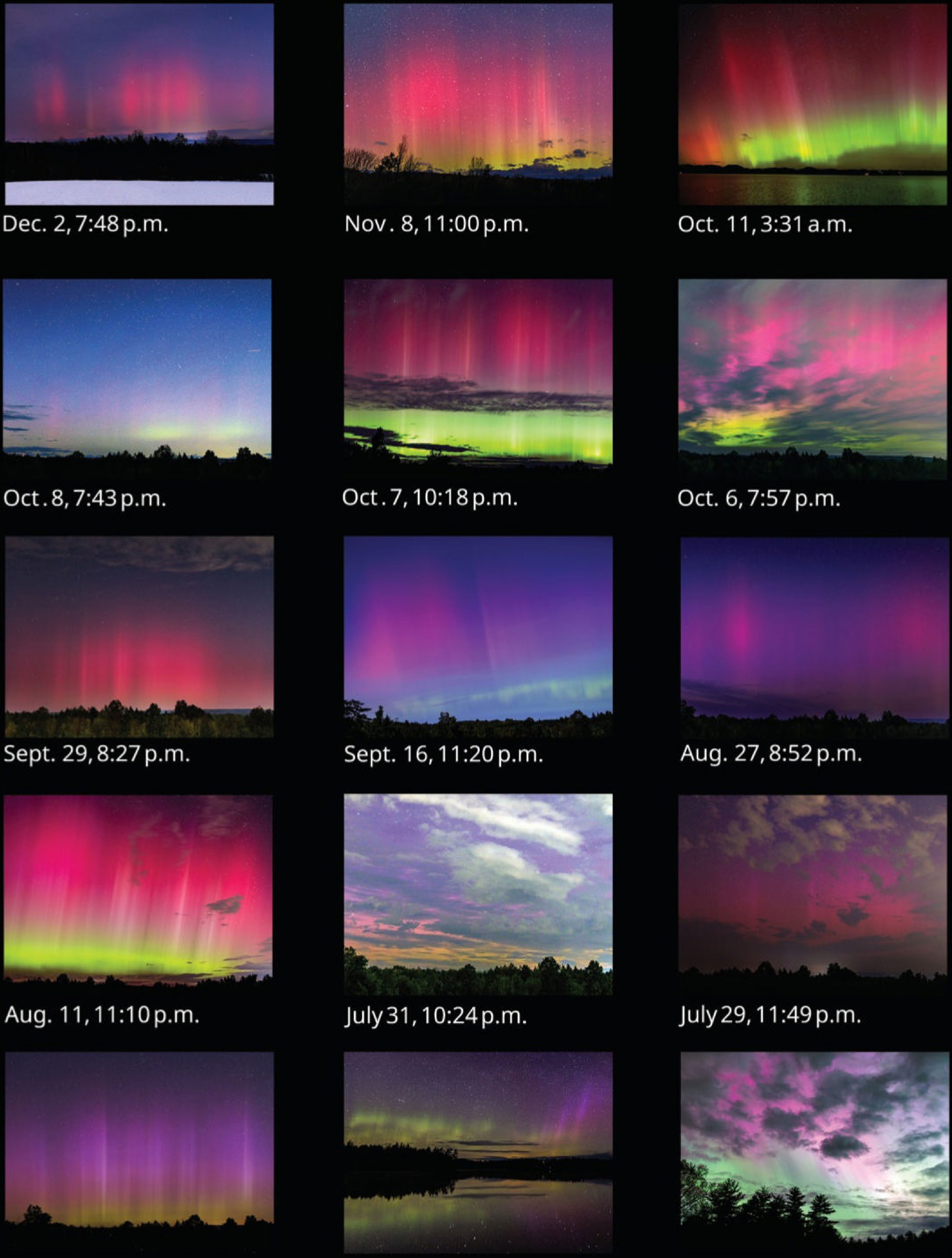
But the week of October 6 was extraordinary for aurora enthusiasts in the Adirondacks as the lights appeared three nights, more than some photographers see in a year in the Northeast.

The Monday after the lighting, Kurt Gardner, a professional photographer in Old Forge, nearly lost his bearings as his stomping grounds turned into a dreamscape—a kaleidoscope of colors from evening until a couple hours before dawn. He raced around capturing the sky over the Moose River, Old Forge Pond, Seventh Lake, Eighth Lake and Raquette Lake.

"The rays were very defined and very, very bright ... the sky was pulsing," Gardner said.

Kurt Gardner waits along Seventh Lake with the northern lights on Nov. 4, 2024.

PHOTO BY KURT GARDNER



Dec. 2, 7:48 p.m.

Nov. 8, 11:00 p.m.

Oct. 11, 3:31 a.m.

Oct. 8, 7:43 p.m.

Oct. 7, 10:18 p.m.

Oct. 6, 7:57 p.m.

Sept. 29, 8:27 p.m.

Sept. 16, 11:20 p.m.

Aug. 27, 8:52 p.m.

Aug. 11, 11:10 p.m.

July 31, 10:24 p.m.

July 29, 11:49 p.m.

June 27, 11:12 p.m.

May 12, 11:21 p.m.

May 10, 10:03 p.m.

Auroras provide different color schemes above the Adirondacks in 2024. These shots are from the Great Sacandaga Lake region, excepting one over Forked Lake on May 12 and over Lake George on the May 10-11. PHOTOS BY JEFF NADLER.

The aurora borealis rolls over the mountains across Elk Lake at 3:59 a.m. on Oct. 11, 2024.

PHOTO BY CARL HEILMAN II

“And, you know, there was a moment that I actually got dizzy.”

Standing alone on the Seventh Lake dock, a vertigo-like sensation overtook him as he looked to the sky.

“Once you get storms like that, for me personally, that's like the Super Bowl, right?” Gardner said. "I mean that was the Hail Mary pass, and I wanted to catch it in every spot."

Solar maximum

About a week after the Adirondack auroras, NASA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the international Solar Cycle Prediction Panel announced that the sun had reached its solar maximum period. During this period, solar storms are more frequent than normal and so are northern lights.

In a fall 2024 interview, NOAA’S Space Weather Prediction Center forecaster Shawn Dahl said the lights will keep turning on. “We’re still in line for a ride with this solar cycle activity through this year, well into next year and maybe even in 2026,” Dahl said.

About every 11 years, the sun's magnetic poles flip, resulting in colorful solar storms, according to NASA. We are currently roughly halfway through Solar Cycle 25, which started in December 2019.

During the peak, sunspots and solar activity increases, causing more solar flares, coronal mass ejections and corona holes. These events break plasma, consisting of electrons and protons, from the sun.

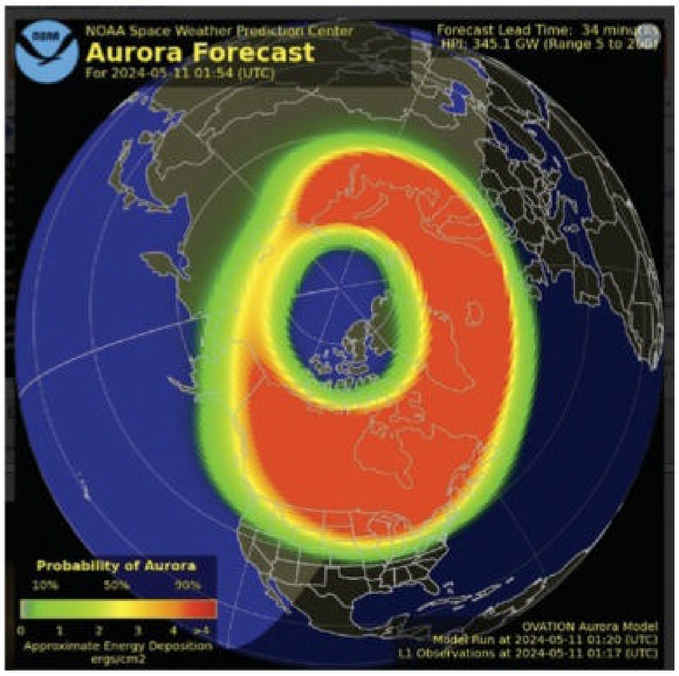
The plasma then travels through space as solar wind that can penetrate Earth’s atmosphere at the north and south poles. When those electrically charged particles interact with oxygen and nitrogen gases, they create greens, reds, purples, blues and pinks that are commonly seen in the most northern and southern latitudes as auroras.

Solar Cycle 25 has been more active than its predecessor, according to scientists, but it isn’t necessarily unusual to have this much activity.

Some of the nights have been particularly noteworthy, including that of May 10-11, when the aurora reached the highest level of intensity, a G5 storm, for the first time since 2003. It was also “possibly among the strongest displays on record in the past 500 years,” according to NASA.

The lights could be seen as far south as Florida.

“That just points to how active this solar cycle has been and how much energy the sun is capable of releasing due to all the magnetic changes and things going on in this particular solar cycle,” Dahl said.


NOAA Space Weather Prediction Center
Aurora Forecast
For 2024-05-11 01:54 (UTC)
Forecast Lead Time: 34 minu
HPI: 345.1 GW (Range 5 to 2
Probability of Aurora
10%
50%
90%
0
1
2
3
4
>4
Approximate Energy Deposition
ergs/cm2
OVATION Aurora Model
Model Run at 2024-05-11 01:20 (UTC)
L1 Observations at 2024-05-11 01:17 (UTC)

NOAA Spaceweather (www.swpc.noaa.gov) offers a three-day and a 30-minute forecast on northern lights. This notice alerted Carl Heilman II to the show he photographed May 10, 2024.

Aurora alerts

Photographer Carl Heilman II has been observing the northern lights since the 1960s, first seeing them in the middle of the night from his childhood home in Lancaster, Pa.

Since then, Heilman has frequently seen the auroras like many people: on the display of his camera (or smartphone), which are more adept at picking up colors.

One of his most memorable viewings occurred in the 1980s when he walked out the door of his Brant Lake home.

“The glow was all around,” he said. “It was just like the forest was on fire”

Back then, seeing the auroras in the Adirondacks was a different production. Heilman relied on television. Faulty reception signaled solar storms. Nowadays aurora chasers rely on apps that share data from NOAA’s Space Weather Prediction Center, Facebook groups and chats that can continue dusk until dawn.

Photographer Jeff Nadler, an administrator for the Aurora Hunters New York Facebook page, immerses himself, using modern technology to track auroras.

Nadler got hooked in March 2023. Initially he relied on NOAA's KP index forecast, which rates the magnitude of geomagnetic storms on a scale up to nine.

“I would sit there on the shore of Great Sacandaga Lake for seven hours, and it never happened,” he said. “I didn't know the KP forecast was really a stab in the dark.”

This is a common mistake among aurora chasers who rely so heavily on the KP Index, waiting for the forecast to hit a five or so to be able to see the lights in the Adirondack Park.

Nadler learned that the science of predicting auroras is nuanced. People need to pay attention to solar wind speeds and densities, the direction of the interplanetary magnetic field, and other factors. The info is all available from NOAA.

In 2024 alone, Nadler has captured about two dozen auroras, a big number for the Adirondack Park. During non-peak years, dedicated aurora chasers might see them a few times, if at all.

Dark skies

The Adirondacks are one of the prime spots to see auroras in the continental U.S. because of the lack of light pollution and relatively northern latitudes.

Recently, viewers have flocked to open spaces in the park. Johnathan Esper, a Lake Placid photographer who frequently disappears into the woods to shoot them, said he's seen hundreds of people show up at the Batchellerville Bridge over the Great Sacandaga Lake in the southern Adirondacks on nights when auroras were forecasted.

Some of the best places are in the southern and central parts of the park where light pollution is nearly non-existent. Hamilton County is one of the least populated counties in the Northeast. Southwestern Essex County is equally as dark and a good spot to see them.

On the night of October 10, when Faltus was driving around looking for the lights in the northern part of the park, Olmstedville resident Amanda Bane cruised the dark roads of the interior Adirondacks.

That night the Indian Lake social worker drove her two-year-old daughter to Overlook Park in Newcomb which offers a dramatic view north across a field toward the distant High Peaks. She had seen the full solar eclipse there in April, but she didn't see anything unusual that October night.

The drive back was quiet, but through the trees, pink and green colors emerged and when she arrived in her driveway, her home was backlit by the aurora. “Being able to see it was just unbelievable,” she said. ■

MIKE LYNCH is the Explorer’s climate reporter.

Advocacy groups are urging the state to obtain the Whitney Park property in Long Lake.
PHOTO BY CARL HEILMAN II

Green groups at a turning point

Environmental watchdogs change guard

BY GWENDOLYN CRAIG

An exodus of green group leaders in the Adirondack Park is setting up 2025 as a year of change.

Longtime leaders of two influential environmental organizations—the Adirondack Council and Protect the Adirondacks—stepped down and new ones are stepping up. And at one of the largest nonprofits, the Adirondack Mountain Club, a search is underway for the next CEO, with the interim director in the running.

Beyond that, environmental organizations with more niche focuses are also experiencing turnover at the top. The Lake George Association welcomed Brendan Wiltse, who left the Adirondack Watershed Institute at Paul Smith's College, as its new executive director. The Open Space Institute is now headed by the former state commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Erik Kulleseid.

Entering 2025, how will these advocacy groups be heard from, and will they be more or less visible under new leadership styles?

Groups that have already left their mark in the Adirondacks through their lobbying, litigation and messaging are evolving and a

From left, the Adirondack Council's Raul "Rocci" Aguirre, the Adirondack Mountain Club's Julia Goren, former council head Willie Janeway and former mountain club executive director Neil Woodworth. PHOTOS PROVIDED, WOODWORTH BY KARA DRY

shift in strategy is becoming evident.

The challenges they face are not just to the natural environment, where devastating floods and tornadoes arise from climate change. Groups are dealing with the rearranged Republican presidential administration and the uncertain environmental commitments of a Democratic governor. They're also keeping watch on the direction of the agency charged with protecting the park and of the interim commissioner running the state's environmental department. Some claim both state regulators have leaned more toward promoting development than conservation over the last couple of decades..

These shifts are happening alongside major policy decisions. The state has been considering edits to the regulations governing the park's public lands, proposing changes so significant that environmental groups rallied for fear of losing wilderness.

As of press time, the edits were still in pencil.

Moreover, last year the Adirondack Park Agency authorized some of the most impactful private development projects in the park over objections of environmental groups—the expansion of a sixth-generation garnet mine and the treatment of the park's cleanest drinking water source with herbicide to combat an invasive species.

The APA, which oversees public and private development, has been neglected by recent governors. Five of eight citizen representatives are serving on expired terms and one seat has been vacant since early 2023. Kathy Hochul has visited the park few times as governor, and state funding for the region has largely been for recreation, like the 34-mile Adirondack Rail Trail or Olympic Regional Development Authority sites.

The state has fallen behind in its land conservation efforts and in reaching its greenhouse gas reduction goals under the state Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. Groups are also bracing for federal regulatory changes to clean water and air protections, which could impact the park as Donald Trump moves back into the White House. Current federal clean air regulations came about after a long-fought campaign by groups like the Adirondack Council, which sought to curb the deleterious impacts of acid rain and succeeded.

"There are so many critical issues right now," said Sarah Collum Hatfield, chair of the Adirondack Council.

Some who have stepped away from the action are alarmed by state and federal stewardship and think the park's nonprofits must take stronger stances.

Willie Janeway, who headed the Adirondack Council for about a decade before retiring in 2023, said he is disappointed in Hochul's "failure to lead on preservation of the East's greatest wilderness, but appreciative that the Legislature has now stepped up to increasingly fill that vacuum." There hasn't been a governor that has championed conservation, wildlife and clean water in the park since Republican Gov. George Pataki, he said.

Janeway, is disappointed, too, in how some environmental groups have responded, or not.

Groups traditionally focused on wilderness preservation have broadened their scope to include issues like housing and community infrastructure. Voices that once boomed in the halls of Albany now seem quieter and more behind the scenes. There are fewer press releases, fewer statements of gubernatorial criticism. And some see the APA's stagnant board, its blanket approval of all projects over the past decade and other examples as showing this more reserved approach isn't working.

As the council celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, Hatfield said the goal is to put opportunities over problems.

Protect the Adirondacks, known for its litigiousness, may also be redirecting its energy.

Peter Bauer led the organization for more than a decade. His legacy includes winning a rare case interpreting the state Constitution's "forever wild" clause. Bauer spent about a year training new Executive Director Claudia Braymer for the role. A Glens Falls environmental attorney, she was part of the forest preserve case.

Between the hire of Braymer and of Conservation Director and Counsel Christopher Amato, also an environmental attorney, it would appear Protect was bolstering its legal expertise to become the park's defense fund. But Charles Clusen, chair of Protect's board, said that was

From left, Pete Nelson. PHOTO PROVIDED **David Gibson.** PHOTO BY CINDY SCHULTZ **Claudia Braymer.** PHOTO BY GWENDOLYN CRAIG

Revenue: About $4.9 million, according to 2022 IRS records

never the intention, and in fact noted that Protect was going to "be careful about picking too many (lawsuits) because we need to have time for all the other things."

He said he has been disappointed with the Hochul administration and Bauer said he's never been able to get a clear statement from the governor's office on its Adirondack agenda. Clusen and Bauer think Hochul can improve her environmental reputation by the state purchasing the remainder of Whitney Park, one of the park's last, largest private inholdings, located in Long Lake.

Hochul spokesman Paul DeMichele said the governor "is a strong advocate of protecting and preserving the Adirondack Park and her administration is continuing its search for the best possible candidates to serve New York State at the Adirondack Park Agency. This process requires time, but it's vital to guarantee the park's future."

The governor's office did not respond to an inquiry about when it would appoint a commissioner of the state Department of Environmental Conservation, filling the post vacated by Basil Seggos in the spring of 2024.

Hochul's spokesman highlighted the $400 million Environmental Protection Fund, which includes $10 million for stewardship in the Adirondacks and Catskills. That funding, however, arrived after lobbying by environmental groups and after the Legislature got it into the state budget.

Hochul's aide also referred to water funding, including a $2 million Survey of Climate Change and Adirondack Lake Ecosystems, which was also not in the governor's initial budget but came through legislative negotiations. After hearing concerns from local governments about their eligibility with water infrastructure grants, the state increased the cap on such grants from 25% of the project costs to 50%, the Hochul administration said. The Adirondack Park received funds from this program.

Leaning into the 2025 legislative session, the Explorer checked in with new and seasoned leaders of the park's environmental organizations, an Adirondack fab five of sorts, who have banded together on advocacy issues like penning a joint letter on the APA's proposed edits to its state land policies.

ADIRONDACK MOUNTAIN CLUB

Year of origin: 1922

Mission: To protect New York wild lands and waters by promoting responsible outdoor recreation and building a statewide constituency of land stewardship advocates.

Membership: More than 30,000

Julia Goren, interim executive director and its first female leader, said what distinguishes the organization from others is its "boots-on-the-ground stewardship." ADK runs visitor centers, conducts educational programming and builds and maintains trails.

A key initiative, the Adirondack High Peaks Summit Stewardship Program, aims to protect the fragile alpine ecosystem on the state's tallest mountains.

Through hiring full-time and seasonal staff, the organization helps attract people to the park where they settle and build families, Goren added. "I think that's a powerful way that ADK makes its mark in the Adirondacks."

Since 2019, ADK has had two different full-time directors. It now has an interim director and is searching for a permanent one. Goren is a candidate.

Neil Woodworth, who worked at the Adirondack Mountain Club for three decades and retired as its executive director in 2019, endorses Goren.

He said he's watched ADK focus on programming in the greater Lake Placid area, and less on constitutional issues impacting the Adirondack and Catskill parks.

Woodworth, ADK's director for about 15 years, said the board sets the policy and emphasis and the board has changed. Woodworth, an attorney who lobbied for the group, passed the torch to another attorney, Michael Barrett, in 2019.

Goren called Barrett a "change agent" who helped ADK "streamline and focus." Under his leadership, ADK purchased the property to create its Cascade Welcome Center outside of Lake Placid and divested its administrative offices in Lake George. And under Barrett, the board consolidated. It used to be made up of members of ADK's 37 chapters, plus others. There are now 15 voting board members.

Barrett resigned last July. A few months later, he took the top post with Habitat for Humanity of New York. In mid-October, ADK posted its search for "a dynamic, visionary, ambitious, and collaborative leader" with business acumen, fundraising experience and the ability to "refine the mission, vision, business model and engagement strategy."

Woodworth calls Goren "very qualified." Barrett and Mickey Orta, president of ADK's board, declined to comment about the search.

ADK is monitoring proposed amendments to the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan, the policy document covering the forest preserve. It has expressed concerns about an APA proposal that could expand motorized access to wilderness, canoe and primitive areas.

ADK also plans to push for funding in the state budget and make sure that the funds are used for what they're supposed to be used for, Goren said. State funds can be slow to get out the door. ADK, for example, is still awaiting a $500,000 Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation grant it was awarded in December 2021.

PROTECT THE ADIRONDACKS

Year of origin: 2009, (the consolidation of the Residents' Committee to Protect the Adirondacks and 1901-born Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks)
Mission: Grassroots protection and stewardship of the public and private lands of the Adirondack Park; building health and diversity of natural and human communities for the benefit of current and future generations.
Membership: Around 2,000
Revenue: Nearly $353,000, according to 2022 IRS records

At the beginning of the year, Braymer became Protect's first female executive director.

Bauer, her predecessor from 2012 to 2023, proved to be a feisty watchdog of state agencies through both research and lawsuits. He is one of the most combative and unabashed voices in the Adirondack Park, and has frequently clashed with both the private sector and local governments.

> **"I do want to remind people that the Adirondack Council has a person of color that runs it, and it's important not just in our circles, but for somebody who picks up a story that has no idea about the council and sees a Latino or Hispanic name, surname, appreciates that that's a unique perspective."**
>
> RAUL "ROCCI" AGUIRRE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE ADIRONDACK COUNCIL

Successful Protect litigation against the state prevented extra-wide snowmobile trails in the park that involved cutting thousands of trees.

"I'm pretty happy as I step back," Bauer said. "We've been able to grow and stabilize the organization, and rack up a long string of successes."

Both Bauer and Braymer highlighted the legal expertise of the organization and said much shouldn't change on that front. But Protect's board chair seemed more reserved about litigation.

Clusen said he's aware of the growing number of lawsuits, but said litigation was not "a deliberate choice."

"We picked Claudia because she had such a strong record on the Adirondacks, and it was great that she's done all these lawsuits," Clusen said. "I assume she will keep her hand in one or two of them ongoing, but I don't think it's going to be her main thing."

Bauer and Braymer agree that the courts are a last resort.

"Successful legal action takes years; it's exhausting; it's unpredictable," Bauer said.

Bauer intends to stay on part-time at least through 2025, assisting with fundraising.

Clusen hopes Protect will spur legislation to reform the Adirondack Park Agency. He has been disappointed with what he sees as a weakening of the APA. Braymer is interested in greater climate change legislation and making the park more diverse and inclusive. They hope to address these topics after a period of leadership adjustment.

ADIRONDACK COUNCIL

Year of origin: 1975
Mission: To ensure the ecological integrity and wild character of the Adirondack Park with clean air and water, large 'forever wild' wilderness areas, working forests and farms, and vibrant, safe, and inclusive communities.
Membership: 18,000 to 20,000
Revenue: About $2.96 million, according to 2022 IRS records

A force in Albany and Washington D.C., the council spends upwards of $250,000 a year on lobbying. The council is also known for its sweeping conservation vision for the park leading into 2050, its annual report cards of lawmakers and agencies and funding on-the-ground research.

Janeway decided to retire after his 2023 resignation, he said, after enjoying his free time. But during his leadership he called for wilderness protection, and had insider government knowledge—he had served as regional director for the state Department of Environmental Conservation in the Hudson Valley and Catskills.

Hatfield, chair of the board, said it was Janeway's decision to leave, and it was a turning point for the organization.

Now more removed from his past role, Janeway said the board "didn't share enthusiasm for taking an even more aggressive, even larger role at that time." He wanted to double the size of the organization, "raise more money and be more aggressive with advocacy for wilderness and the benefits that people get, being vocal about truth to power and less afraid of people disagreeing with you, as long as we're respectful."

Board members deserved a leader aligned with their advocacy philosophy, he said, and noted a change in strategy could be for the better.

"I see increased pressure on environmental advocates to prioritize being nice, and not disruptive, at the expense of advancing their mission," Janeway said. "Advocacy groups across the spectrum are moving to be more risk averse, more hesitant to speak truth to power."

Raul "Rocci" Aguirre, executive director of the council, said "there is a time and a place for being more critical." It's easier to speak out when you're no longer working in a formal position, he noted.

Aguirre, who served as deputy director under Janeway and had left for an executive director position at Scenic Hudson, returned to the council and eventually was promoted to acting director. Hatfield said after a national search, the board realized they already had who they needed.

"It's hard to understate Willie's impact on the organization," Hatfield said. "We always talk about it being the right time for a certain kind of leadership. Now is the time for a Rocci Aguirre leadership."

Aguirre started his career as a wilderness ranger and has worked in multiple parks of the United States. He is the council's first executive director of color. Of Hispanic and Jewish heritage, Aguirre said he's been using his first name Raul more than his nickname.

"I do want to remind people that the Adirondack Council has a person of color that runs it, and it's important not just in our circles, but for somebody who picks up a story that has no idea about the council and sees a Latino or Hispanic name, surname, appreciates that that's a unique perspective," Aguirre said.

Aguirre wants to see more political and funding wins for the Adirondacks this year, whether that's more water and wastewater infrastructure projects or more forest rangers.

The council will also advocate to get the governor to add $100 million more—a total of $500 million—into the Environmental Protection fund for potential land purchases in the Adirondack Park.

"My North Star is still wilderness," Aguirre said. "I think what has shifted is appreciating what's needed to protect wilderness, and I would say that the more you create allies and support within the communities that are surrounded by wild places, the more support that places have."

Aaron Mair, the former national president of the Sierra Club, is also leaving the council after heading its "Forever Adirondacks" campaign. The campaign focused on both state and federal policy for protecting clean water and wilderness with a focus on job creation. Set up as a three-year position, Mair's work on the campaign will be integrated into the entire council's team, Hatfield and Aguirre said.

Adirondack green groups direct their attention on Gov. Kathy Hochul. PHOTO BY WILL WALDRON/TIMES UNION

ADIRONDACK WILD: FRIENDS OF THE FOREST PRESERVE

Year of origin: 2010 (with roots to Friends of the Forest Preserve founded in 1945)
Mission: To advance New York's 'forever wild' legacy and forest preserve policies in the Adirondack and Catskill Parks, and promote public and private land stewardship that is consistent with wild land values through education, advocacy and research.
Membership: Around 1,000
Revenue: About $171,000 according to 2022 IRS records

The organization is run by David Gibson and Ken Rimany. Gibson is often the voice for the organization and has an extensive knowledge of the park and its organizations. He was the former executive director of The Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks and Protect the Adirondacks.

There have been no major changes to the group's mission or goals, he said, and there are no succession plans as of now. While both Gibson and Rimany are past the "traditional age of retirement," Gibson joked, he said he has no plans to retire.

"Paul Schaefer said this is a lifelong obligation," Gibson said, referencing the organization's founder and notable Adirondack conservationist.

But Gibson is one of the few environmental activists answering Janeway's call of "speaking truth to power." The watchdog organization's longer mission statement notes it is a defender of the forest preserve against "threats, many of which come from the very state agencies responsible for protecting the great park, but who, too often, betray their legal responsibilities."

At a hearing about the proposed changes to the park's master plan, Gibson asserted that, if such amendments become adopted, Hochul would be the first governor to weaken the state's wilderness protections.

"The laws haven't changed fundamentally," Gibson said. "They're just being reinterpreted or misinterpreted by the state agencies, and the latest example is the master plan."

ADIRONDACK WILDERNESS ADVOCATES

Year of origin: Founded in 2016, incorporated in 2019
Mission: Dedicated to promoting knowledge, enjoyment, expansion, and protection of the wildest places in the Adirondack Park.
Membership: No formal number
Revenue: Less than $50,000

A newer group, Adirondack Wilderness Advocates, sprang up around the classification of the Boreas Ponds Tract. It favors expansion of wilderness and wilderness-like areas throughout the park, which are the most protected and without motorized vehicle use.

Pete Nelson, co-founder, described it as ordinary people working without paid staff or lobbyists and with a bank account so small, it does not need to file a public tax form.

But the group has made its mark among the state's decision makers. It has had a seat at the table of a state committee investigating visitor use of the High Peaks and it has served on a forest preserve trail working group.

"We feel that we are taken as seriously as we are because of our grassroots nature, and the fact that we know what we're focused on," Nelson said. "That allows us to be very straight with what we do. ... It's not the same kind of level of politics that go with more organizations that are more complex with staff, a board and more presence in Albany."

Embracing a watchdog approach, it documented non-conforming structures the state has failed to remove on forest preserve. Co-founder Bill Ingersoll has spotted DEC staff illegally using ATVs in a wilderness area, which led to a reprimand from the APA.

The group's focus is on educating the public about visitor use management and the value of remoteness. ■

GWENDOLYN CRAIG is the Explorer's policy reporter, focusing on regulation.

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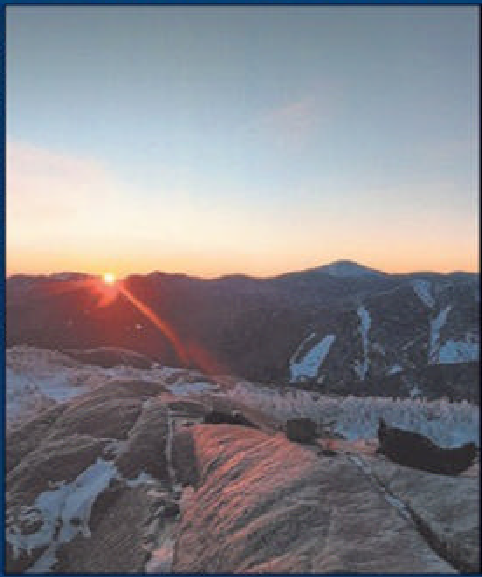

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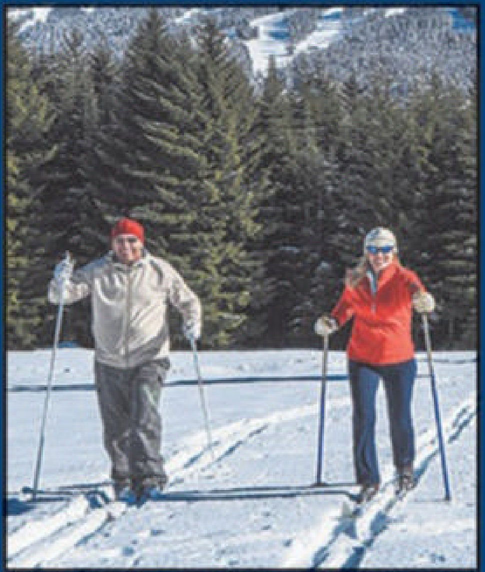

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Forever wild for all

Environmental activist wants to include the next generation of stewards

BY DAVID ESCOBAR

Aaron Mair, who ended his three-year stint with the Adirondack Council in December, surveys the John Brown Farm site in North Elba. PHOTO BY DAVID ESCOBAR

As Aaron Mair exits the Adirondack Council to lead a nonprofit startup, he sees the Adirondack Park conservation movement at a turning point. Rising visitor numbers and the effects of climate change are straining the region and its natural resources, the Schenectady-based environmental activist warns.

"We're beyond recreation," Mair said. "This is an ecological necessity to protect humanity."

Mair, 64, a former epidemiological-spatial analyst for the state Department of Health, is moving on from his post-retirement job at the helm of the Adirondack Council's "Forever Adirondacks" campaign. His three-year post ended in December.

In addition to lobbying for the region to transition to a green job-based economy, Mair has focused on protecting the park's wilderness areas and waterways, which he said play an outsized role in maintaining the state's air quality and water supply.

Despite his desire for a diverse coalition of environmental advocates, Mair said he confronts a persistent myth: that conservation is only for affluent white people.

"Environmentalism is not a petit bourgeois white thing—it's an all-people thing," said Mair. "The environment does not care about your politics, your race, your class or your cast ... We are all equally, and could disproportionately be, as affected by it."

A lifelong ambition

Mair's inclusive approach to conservation traces to his early years on the front lines of the environmental justice movement. In the 1980s, he worked to shut down a state-owned trash-burning plant in Albany, which had been producing toxic ash that blew directly onto his community. Mair said he had attempted to collaborate with the Sierra Club. However, Mair and other Black advocates were turned away and told to direct their requests to the NAACP.

"So even within the environmental movement, we were just the wrong complexion for protection," he said.

Mair later joined and rose up the historic green group and became the club's first Black president in 2015.

He sought to convince more people of color to join its coalition — a mission he has carried back to the Adirondacks.

"People of color have always had a particular fingerprint, signature and impact on this park."

As part of "Forever Adirondacks," Mair sought to forge connections with diverse leaders, including state legislators from New York's Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian caucus. Through tours of John Brown Farm near Lake Placid, Mair said caucus members learned about the park's connections to the early abolition movement and the historic Timbuctoo settlement for Black farmers.

"A sense of hallowed ground was kindled in the heart of our legislators," said Mair.

Rocci Aguirre, executive director of the Adirondack Council, said Mair's experience as a community organizer has helped the group expand its reach outside the park, which has connected more diverse communities to the Adirondacks.

"We often say that we want it to be forever wild for everyone," he said. "That's one of Aaron's legacies."

Molding future stewards

Mair's outreach to caucus leaders helped alert policymakers, but he wanted to get the attention of younger people as well.

Mair said one of his proudest accomplishments has been his collaboration with the Timbuctoo Institute, a SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry program that brings high schoolers from urban areas into the park to learn about environmental justice and climate science.

Many institute students come from marginalized backgrounds and lack exposure to the Adirondacks.

They become enchanted with the park's natural spaces as soon as they set foot on a trail, he said, and they show interest in science.

"It's the opportunity," said Mair.

As for the future, Mair will continue working to increase opportunities for people of color to visit the Adirondacks. Drawing on the success of the Timbuctoo Institute's work with students in Brooklyn and Syracuse, he founded the Timbuctoo Mountain Club in the summer of 2024.

This new not-for-profit aims to connect underserved communities with outdoor recreation, addressing what Mair describes as a long-overlooked gap in New York's environmental efforts.

> **"Environmentalism is not a petit bourgeois white thing— it's an all-people thing. The environment does not care about your politics, your race, your class or your caste."**

"We're breaking into a neglected space," he said, pointing a need for state investment in programs designed to bring people of color to the outdoors.

Unlike his earlier student-focused initiative, the Timbuctoo Mountain Club will reach beyond schools and engage diverse communities in urban areas like Albany and Rochester.

Mair also plans to collaborate with partner organizations to secure resources for housing and transporting program participants.

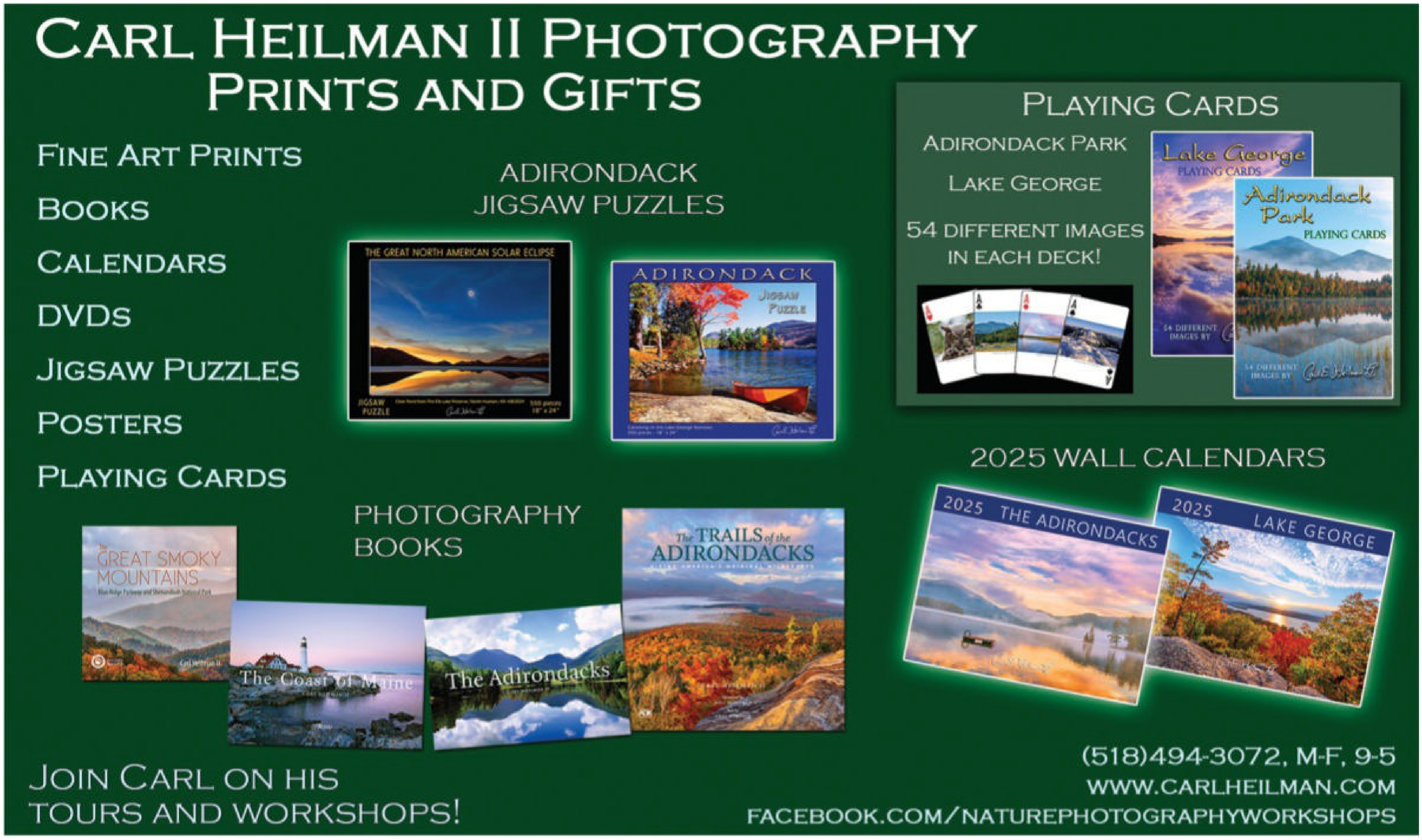
Adirondack Park Agency board member Benita Law-Diao has worked on projects with Mair, organizing trips to the Adirondacks specifically for people of color.

The excursions play a vital role in introducing newcomers to the park, she said. "How do we protect the Adirondacks if people don't even know it exists?" she said.

As New York's population grows more diverse, Mair believes creating equitable access to the park is essential to cultivating a broader appreciation for its natural beauty. Over the coming months, he plans to fundraise for his organization, which he hopes will empower underserved communities to be part of the next generation of park stewards.

"We need them because we need to protect nature for nature's sake," Mair said. ■

DAVID ESCOBAR is a Report For America Corps Member. He reports on diversity issues in the Adirondacks through a partnership between North Country Public Radio and Adirondack Explorer.



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Working through the hurt

Diversity leader juggles jobs, expectations

BY DAVID ESCOBAR

For Adirondack Diversity Initiative director Tiffany Rea-Fisher, inclusivity is a fundamental ingredient in the region's economic and social well-being.

"It behooves us to be a welcoming place," she said. "For this area to thrive, people have to fall in love with it."

Rea-Fisher, 43, has been traveling back and forth between the Adirondacks and New York City for over 20 years. She became captivated by the region during her early years as a dance instructor at the Lake Placid School of Dance.

After becoming the school's director in 2018, she found that her role as a Black female leader in a predominantly white community deepened her understanding of the complex experiences of people of color in the Adirondacks.

Professional dance obligations continue to tie Rea-Fisher to Manhattan. She serves as the artistic director for EMERGE125 dance company in Harlem. It is also where she raises her young daughter. The girl served as the inspiration for Rea-Fisher's decision to become ADI's second executive director in February 2023.

"I'd been thinking a lot about the next generation of Adirondackers," she said. "I felt that if I didn't go for this job, I would just be someone who was critiquing this place that I love without an action behind it."

PHOTO BY DAVID ESCOBAR

"Responsive, not reactive"

ADI's three-person staff operates across 14 counties, focusing its work on seven areas of diversity, including race, gender, age and socioeconomic status.

In 2024, the work was funded by a combination of private donations and $420,000 from the state budget—an increase of nearly 30% compared to the previous year.

Rea-Fisher said her vision goes beyond ADI's past work. She said that in 2020, amid heightened racial tensions, ADI was pulled into responding to national and global events rather than concentrating on local needs.

"That's a big ask," she said. "One of the things I said to my team is that I want us to be responsive without being reactive."

A core program centers on cultural consciousness training for local law enforcement. Rea-Fisher sees law enforcement as an essential point of contact for residents and visitors and wants officers to better understand the history of policing, which traces back to slave catchers in the 1700s.

"The point of the training is not shame and blame, but education," she said.

ADI leads an emerging stewards program to encourage young people of color from outside the region to explore the park. In collaboration with North Country Community College, ADI also provides local businesses with DEI training to help foster more inclusive workplaces and customer experiences.

Pete Nelson, a co-founder of the initiative, said it plays a key role. He hopes inclusion efforts will improve the park's future.

"This world-class jewel needs to belong to everybody, and that means it's valued by everybody," Nelson said. "If you don't feel comfortable here ... the park loses, and we all lose."

Nelson acknowledged that the impact of DEI programs unfolds gradually but said he admires ADI's success in building coalitions of support, especially given its limited staff and resources.

Looking forward

Despite her passion for the role, Rea-Fisher said balancing her work in the Adirondacks with her life in New York City has presented challenges.

"A week for me is absurd and chaotic in the best way," Rea-Fisher said.

To meet commitments, Rea-Fisher spends three to four days at a time in each region. However, some diversity leaders have questioned her visibility at Adirondack community events compared to former ADI director Nicole Hylton-Patterson.

Rea-Fisher is aware of these concerns but said that much of her time in the Adirondacks is focused behind the scenes on training programs. Even when away, she said she remains responsible for addressing community concerns.

She said the sustainability of that lifestyle can feel uncertain, especially considering the emotional toll of her work.

"In the DEI space, the burnout rate is high," she said. "I have to go into rooms of people who do not look like myself and basically teach them why it's important to treat people who look like me as human beings ... and that means that my heart gets hurt by the work, by design."

As she looks ahead, she expects challenges with the arrival of climate refugees and the effects of climate change intensify.

"That's why I'm trying to educate our businesses and schools about welcoming and belonging," she said. "As these refugees come, it behooves us to make sure that they feel welcome so that they can invest in this place."

Ultimately, Rea-Fisher said she wants ADI to accomplish its goals and lay the groundwork for its own extinction.

"The payoff probably won't happen in my lifetime, but the goal is to get to the point where the Adirondack Diversity Initiative wouldn't even have to exist." ■

A slider jumps on his sled in World Cup skeleton action at Mount Van Hoevenberg on March 21, 2024.
PHOTO BY NANCIE BATTAGLIA

Olympic facilities leader restacks the authority

Changes afoot amid challenges

BY JAMES M. ODATO

As Ashley Walden heads into her second full year leading the Olympic Regional Development Authority, she has a huge budget and tough decisions ahead.

Attempting to reorganize a branch of government set in its ways, she has been responding to a host of management and operational deficiencies that need to be shored up, according to data and interviews.

"These are things that take time in a large scale, relatively slow-moving organization," said Tait Wardlaw, head of marketing and communications, one of Walden's newest hires.

After nearly $700 million in improvements to facilities since 2017, and hundreds of million more in the pipeline, the authority aims to bring in big events, many of which lose money but help fill hotel beds and restaurant seats. With facilities in the best shape they've been

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WAGES ARE COMPETITIVE	-35
SATISFIED WITH SAFETY AND WORKING CONDITIONS	+34
MORALE IN DEPARTMENT IS GOOD	+9
FEEL VALUED BY THE OLYMPIC AUTHORITY	-21
INFORMED OF COMPANY INFORMATION/DIRECTION	-31
LEADERSHIP PROVIDES A POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT	-16
REPUTATION AS GOOD PLACE TO WORK	-25

Some results of an internal survey of Olympic Regional Development Authority employees from February 2024; the higher the number above zero, the better the reflection on the employer. The numbers represent the difference between the percent that strongly agree or strongly disagree.

in decades, Walden is looking internally to line up the authority for success.

That includes replacing some new administrators in her cabinet after a host of departures. She's also created three vice president positions.

While managing a capital project program and studying facility operating methods, Walden has focused on event development. For most of 2024, she pushed to get New York in the running for the 2026 Winter Olympics sliding competitions should Italy be unable to build a bobsled/luge/skeleton track in time. Decisions on when to begin spending $96 million to upgrade Mount Van Hoevenberg ride on whether Lake Placid becomes the alternate site for sliding.

She also said she would prioritize environmental programs. She planned to unveil a sustainability policy in December 2024 that would include elements of climate stability, decarbonizing operations, natural resources protection and developing an organizational culture. However, she did not present the policy at the December board meeting.

Some of what is informing Walden's work is a recent survey of the 1,500 employees of ORDA, which runs the state's downhill and Nordic centers and is one of the largest employers in the Adirondack Park. She particularly needs to boost her team's communications skills and do more than discuss the importance of sustainability programs.

A third of the workforce answered the survey in February, six months into Walden's career as chief executive officer of ORDA. The surveys have been conducted the past few years to gain personnel insights.

Many like the job she's doing—37% strongly approve and 35% strongly disapprove and 28% were "passive" to the question—but a majority do not know or understand the direction of the authority. Most feel they are not recognized or valued or placed in a positive work environment.

The workforce gives ORDA flunking grades across the board for its commitment to sustainability programs—even after investments in an electric groomer and ice resurfacer, solar panels and high-efficiency snow guns..

"It's a snapshot, a look back," said Wardlaw, referring to the survey, provided after a public records request. "The process of addressing employee issues is a long process."

As part of her internal examination, Walden also faced a whistleblower's complaint from a paid ski patroller that asserted that grooming and snowmaking operations at Whiteface

Olympic Regional Development Authority CEO Ashley Walden listens during an ORDA board meeting. PHOTO BY NANCIE BATTAGLIA

SUSTAINABILITY A TOP PRIORITY -9

ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY +32

EXPOSED TO SUSTAINABILITY MESSAGES FREQUENTLY -42

POINT OUT SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES OR OPPORTUNITIES -34

SATISFIED WITH COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY -25

Employees surveyed anonymously gave low marks to environmental sustainability progress. The numbers are the spread between percentages of the 510 employees who responded who strongly agree or disagree.

Mountain were endangering staff and guests. Though she said it wasn't connected to the complaint, Walden summoned Bruce Transue, general manager at ORDA's Belleyare Mountain Ski Center in the Catskills, to assess Whiteface.

She said he made recommendations involving improving trail signs and maps. "He did not look at safety and he did not highlight there being any immediate concerns that he recognized there," she said.

In the fall, Walden named Transue to the new post of vice president for alpine centers. General managers of Gore and Whiteface mountains report to him.

He was one of three administrators promoted to become vice presidents, the other two being the former head of the Olympic ski jumping center and Mount Van Hoevenberg, now VP for events, and for the Olympic ice center in Lake Placid, now in charge of the non-alpine facilities.

"The restructuring aligns more people, more attention, more resources toward all the things included in the mission," Wardlaw said, adding that the appointments jibe with responses in the employee survey, such as the need to improve knowledge of the company direction and to recognize employees.

Wardlaw said the authority is working on ways to measure success toward achieving the mission goals—economic and social benefit from the operations of year-round sports facilities with an emphasis on environmental stewardship, fiscal responsibility and delivery of programs for all people.

Walden, 43, a former Olympic luger, previously was the head of the group that created the World University Games in Lake Placid in 2023, which cost the state $57 million and met about 60% of ticket sales.

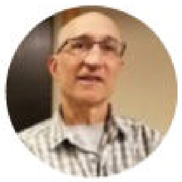
Betty Little, a board member who has made public appearances with Walden, said she is impressed with how organized Walden is. Art Lussi, another board member, said he is "very pleased" with Walden, who he described as energetic, confident, inquisitive about the value of proposed events and connected to the bobsled, luge and skeleton community. "She's about creating her own team right now," he said.

Chairman Joe Martens called her "unflappable" and acknowledged it takes time to put an administration together. "She's got a ton of challenges," he said, listing construction projects and noting the mixed responses of the employee survey. "She's going to continue to refine her team," he said. "People get used to one form of leadership. They have to get used to another." He described the survey results constructive feedback.

The survey showed deep agreement that the sustainability commitment needs more energy. Just 27% were strongly satisfied with adherence to environmental goals.

General morale, which several ORDA employees have said in interviews is poor (as long as their names were not used, to prevent retribution), showed up on the survey this way: 39% strongly felt it was good and 30% strongly disagreed it was good.

"This data tells us there are areas we need to prioritize to address employee concerns," Wardlaw said. ■



JAMES ODATO is the Adirondack Explorer's editor

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A chorus on climate

Adirondack activists rise to a cause

BY CHLOE BENNETT

Global climate change is reshaping life in the Adirondack Park, from fewer snow days to disruptions in maple syrup production. By the 2030s, scientists foresee a potential temperature shift of more than 3 degrees, which could have an outsized impact on the local climate.

In response, residents and local leaders are spreading awareness and working on solutions.

They are educating the next generation of climate activists and scientists or developing parkwide programs to deal with waste or researching the natural world through an Indigenous lens.

A few are just beginning their careers. Others are decades into environmental work.

During the past 12 months, the Adirondack Explorer featured some of these people in the online video series, "Climate Voices of the Adirondacks." Here they are in print:

Indigenous knowledge and wetlands

Keeley Jock, 22, of Saranac Lake grew up with the Iroquois/Haudenosaunee philosophy of stewarding Earth's environment with care so that people seven generations ahead can benefit.

The principle, taught to her while living in the St. Lawrence River community of Akwesasne, guides her now as a climate justice fellow with the Adirondack North Country Association.

"You're just borrowing the Earth from the future, and you have to, at some point, give it back," Jock said.

For a 2023 undergraduate project for Paul Smith's College, she returned to Akwesasne to study a wetland historically dismissed as unusable acreage. Jock reassessed the land using criteria through an Indigenous lens.

The project, which flipped the federal Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) wetland assessment, analyzed the water and plants for medicinal, ceremonial, food and material use. Her analysis showed a higher land value than the EPA's.

"We were able to prove that Indigenous knowledge is useful and should be used in tandem with Western science," she said.

With a bachelor's in environmental science and experience speaking at conferences like the Adirondack Research Consortium and a TEDx event at the Wild Center, Jock may pursue a graduate degree.

"I think that there are some misconceptions with thinking that Indigenous knowledge is something that's of the past and not adaptive … but it's not, because Indigenous people have adapted to the environment that they're in."

Canoeing and shifting the climate narrative

Garrett Marino, 23, of Saranac Lake traveled from his hometown in Connecticut for month-long paddling trips in Canada, where he said he felt more at home. He graduated from Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs in 2023 and found a job with the Wild Center in Tupper Lake as the youth climate leadership coordinator.

"Seeing all these problems in the world and thinking to myself, there has to be something better," he said. "There has to be another way to live that's closer to nature, that's respectful and really just more reciprocal."

Marino is part of the Wild Center's youth climate summits and facilitates climate justice and solutions programs. He's also helping Saranac Lake in its Climate Smart Community mission, part of a statewide program to foster climate resilience projects.

He tries to direct people to a broader understanding of climate change mitigation, he said.

"It's really reframing and shifting the narrative around it," Marino said. "It's not that we need to be afraid of this so we should be inspired to action. It's that we love our planet and we love nature and we love the critters and the bugs and everything on it and it's worth protecting."

Protest art and diplomacy

Almy Bartis, 26, of Saranac Lake left her home in Schaghticoke for art school aspiring to enter the entertainment industry as an animator. The 2016 election made her rethink that.

"I remember being excited to vote, but not being excited at the outcome and feeling this kind of sense of despair and dread," Bartis said.

Inspired by environmental activists like Greta Thunberg, Bartis started painting and designing graphics to protest fossil fuels and wars. Every part of life is connected to climate change, she said, and art is a way to express her concern over it.

"I just felt really compelled to be a part of that movement because I think the environment is something we should all preserve and care about and protect," she said. "Destroying our environment has implications on other people too, all throughout the world, whether it be in the Adirondacks or in the Middle East."

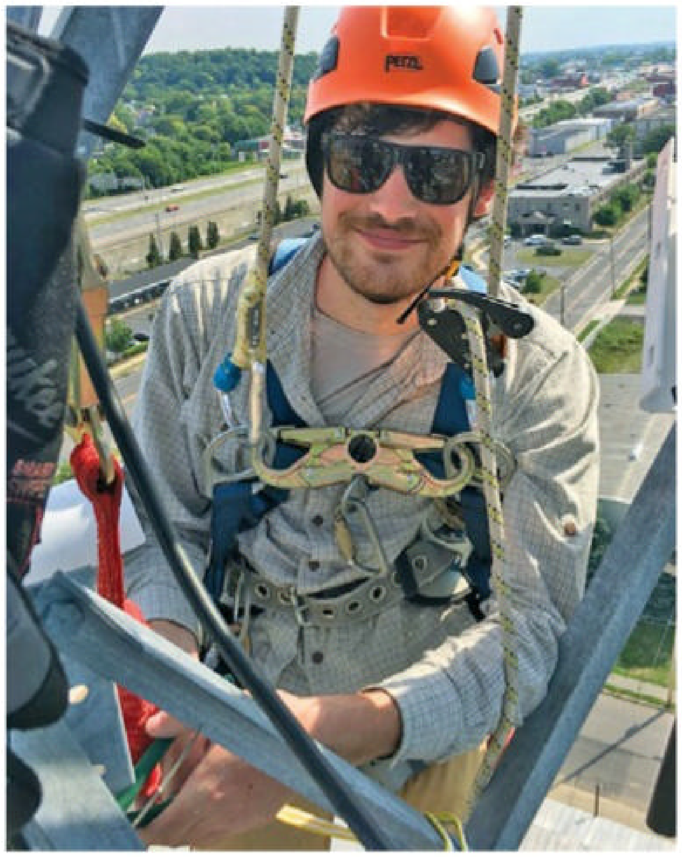
Bartis became a Climate Reality Project science and solutions associate, working remotely from the Adirondacks. The nonprofit trains people to organize advocacy groups and strategies for an energy transition away from fossil fuels.

Recently, she moved to Leiden University in the Netherlands to pursue a master's degree in international relations and diplomacy. She thinks about applying her skills for the cause: "It's a balance between doing what you believe you can do as a person and also using your power to speak to the powers that be in the government and lobby and advocate for what we can do at the state or federal or international level to really avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis."

Outdoor adventures and long-term monitoring

LJ Mills, 30, of Newcomb grew up in Skaneateles, enjoying the Adirondack Park for canoeing, skiing and hiking. Now the wilderness is where he lives and works full-time.

Mills in 2016 accepted a job with the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, his alma mater, as a biogeochemical research support specialist. He spends hours each week in the 15,000-acre Huntington



From top left, **Keeley Jock, Garrett Marino, Almy Bartis. Bottom from left, LJ Mills, Charlie Reinertsen.** PHOTOS (JOCK) COURTESY OF KEELY JOCK; (MARINO) COURTESY OF THE WILD CENTER; (BARTIS) COURTESY OF THE CLIMATE REALITY PROJECT; (REINERTSEN) COURTESY OF CHARLIE REINERSTEN

Wildlife Forest monitoring changes in the ecosystem and lives in a property on the campus near the Adirondack Interpretive Center office.

Sites along the Arbutus watershed have been observed for about 50 years by Mills and others, creating an encyclopedia of environmental knowledge. The information is vital to understanding how the Adirondacks could change in the future.

"Climate change is pretty complex with a lot of dynamic pieces," he said. He said he's helping to maintain a "large volume of data that's going to be an important baseline to monitor the impacts of climate change."

Northern peatlands and art

Charlie Reinertsen, 34, of Ray Brook had an idea about his future early. Growing up in the wilds of Michigamme, Michigan, he charted a path to study the environment and recreation in Minnesota and Wyoming.

"I was always chasing toads and frogs and snakes and then just decided to make a living out of it," Reinertsen said.

Before moving to the Adirondack Park in 2021, Reinertsen was in Massachusetts working in communications for a conservation organization. An application to design a museum exhibit dedicated to climate solutions attracted the writer and photography hobbyist.

A year later, Reinertsen helped cover a 3,000-square-foot room in the Wild Center in Tupper Lake with interactive displays on composting, renewable energy and other ways to combat climate calamities.

The designer interviewed 12 North Country residents with a history of working on climate mitigation, including Stephen Langdon, director of Shingle Shanty Preserve near Long Lake. Langdon studies the site's 2,000 acres of peatlands, a type of wetland that stores immense amounts of carbon dioxide, and introduced Reinertsen to its biological diversity.

"I started to explore more and more of our northern peatlands, which to me is the ecosystem in the Adirondacks that just completely captivates me," Reinertsen said. "It's a mysterious place."

Now he photographs the Adirondack wetlands and features them in galleries and on a blog.

He also runs a freelance outdoor media company. Most Monday nights, the naturalist is indoors at The Garagery for a Saranac Lake hootenanny with local musicians. Reinertsen sprinkles the environment, and his curiosity about peatlands, into his songwriting.

"They are essentially these enigmas of the natural world that for me … provide endless opportunities to explore through photography and video and writing," he said.

From left, **Saikat Chakraborty with Moose the dog, Sunita Halasz and Jennifer Perry.** CHAKRABORTY PHOTO COURTESY OF SAIKAT CHAKRABORTY; HALASZ AND JENNIFER PERRY PHOTOS BY CHLOE BENNETT Opposite Page: **Connie Perry.** PHOTO BY TOM FRENCH

International perspective and solutions

Saikat Chakraborty, 35, of Saranac Lake thought he would spend his career in a medical lab. While earning a doctorate in chemistry from the University of Rochester, he became captivated by renewable energy made from sunlight and water.

That work led him to become a professor in Paul Smith's College's Department of Natural Science where he introduces students to international environmental studies and literature.

Chakraborty grew up in Durgapur, West Bengal, in India before moving to New York in 2013. On weekends he visited the Adirondack Park to camp and hike with friends and moved to Saranac Lake in 2021.

Chakraborty, a photographer and blogger, gains inspiration from the park and writes about what the North Country could look like if global warming continues.

In the classroom, Chakraborty said his students are hopeful for climate solutions but aren't always sure about their course of action. Still, their optimism for the future is encouraging.

He understands that young activists can be unsure of the effective way to be an activist. Some vandalize artwork or museums to get their message across. "There is a lot of concern, discussion, confusion about what's the best way to navigate," he said. "And when you are connected on social media, you see all of those different things and all of them might seem appealing."

"Right or wrong is a different thing."

Changing winters and rural resilience

Sunita Halasz, 48, of Saranac Lake experienced poor skiing conditions when El Niño visited her hometown of Rochester.

Years later, she watched her children play in mud puddles in what should have been deep snow in the Adirondacks, furthering her fear of global warming.

"Those very personal things that you experience in this changing climate I think are very motivational," she said.

Such changing weather prompted Halasz, who worked as an ecologist for the Adirondack Park Agency from 2000 to 2006, to form a climate education club for home-schooled students. The North Country Climate Club meets regularly to talk about science and solutions.

"They are helping to create this intergenerational network of people who are finding a way to come together and take action," she said.

Halasz directed her passion for climate change mitigation to the newly formed Adirondack Climate Outreach and Resilience Network (ACORN), made up of scientists and educators in the park. The group traveled parkwide to learn more about the impacts of extreme weather.

ACORN will compile a database of funding opportunities for infrastructure fixes and other climate-related projects for nonprofits and towns to access. The overall goal is to boost rural resilience in a region sometimes forgotten by those carving up state funding, Halasz said.

"It takes individuals caring about communities in the Adirondacks and wanting to see them thrive to really pull us all up by our shared bootstraps," she said.

Composting and community

Malone native Jennifer Perry, 53, went to Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs not intending to become an environmentalist. But joining an environmental club awakened her to the climate crisis, motivating her to act.

"It was literally like somebody smacked me in the face," she said. "There's a major, major thing going on that we need to be concerned about."

Nearly 30 years later, she uses her environmental education and gardening experience operating two compost programs in two Adirondack towns. Perry helped found AdkAction's Compost for Good program and operates River Valley Regeneratives, which composts waste and grows food with the material.

By creating compost, Perry helps prevent methane emissions in landfills from piles of food scraps. The mixture also feeds soil, potentially boosting carbon storage capacity.

Perry also advocates for renewable energy projects. Climate change is already here, she said, and requires immediate action.

"There are people who I want to unify with and some of those people if I say the word 'climate change' it immediately is not a unifier, it immediately is a divider," Perry said. "Those

same exact people I can go into a meeting with and be like, 'Let's compost, let's put solar panels up and talk about the solutions and model the solutions,' they are now my ally."

"Climate Voices of the Adirondacks" will continue in 2025. To watch videos or nominate someone for the series, scan this code:

Recreation and accessibility

Connie Perry, 70, remembers her youth in Rochester exploring the woods or paddling on a lake. After she discovered Inlet with a friend, moving to the Adirondacks appealed to her.

She did and founded One Square Mile of Hope in Inlet in 2008 after that same friend died of breast cancer. The event, which brought together hundreds of kayakers and canoeists to Fourth Lake, has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for cancer awareness.

She also facilitates renewable energy and environmental projects at the town's shuttered schoolhouse and runs a kayak and canoe business. The Inlet Area Community Task Force created community gardens and opened its doors to indoor growers.

Perry said it can be difficult for some to access food in the tucked-away town, and the school's space can help fill that need.

Perry worked on applying for grants to purchase heat pumps and hopes to one day install solar panels on the school's roof, creating a showcase for the town. Still, not everyone supports investing in renewable energy, she said.

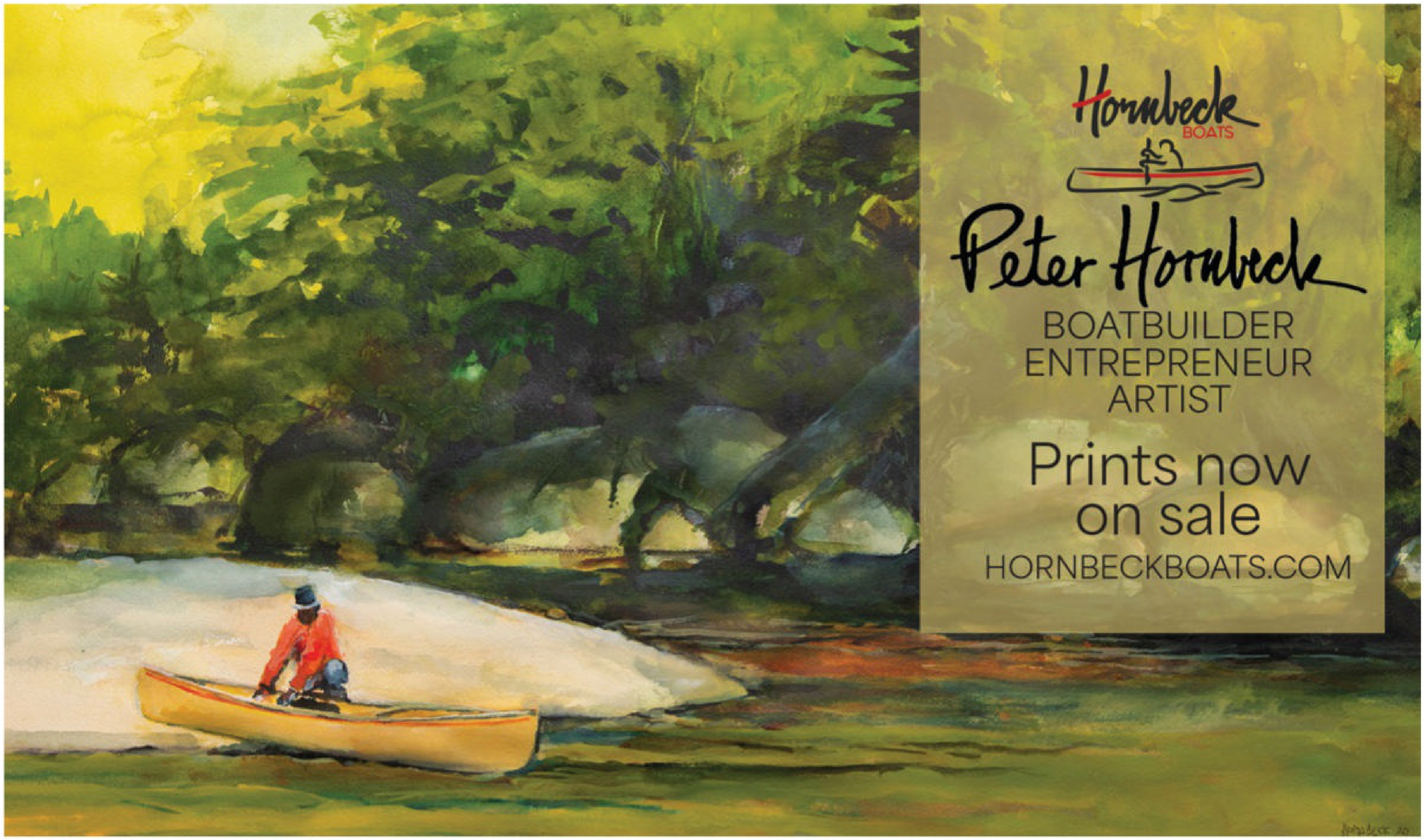
"It does take some convincing for a lot of people to know that that's an option and they can make a difference," she said.

With a background in helping people with disabilities and youth, Perry said she enjoys introducing visitors to the beauty of the Adirondacks.

"Nature is very healing, so that connection is super important," she said. "If we can preserve that and introduce other people to that, then I think we're doing a very positive thing and we're preserving the environment.

"We're preserving what is the best of us." ■

CHLOE BENNETT is the Explorer's former climate change reporter.



Filling gaps, playing a role

The Adirondacks' Regent knows rural needs

BY SARA FOSS

Regent Roger Catania lives two miles from Petrova Elementary School in Saranac Lake.
PHOTO BY MIKE LYNCH

As superintendent at the Lake Placid Central School District, Roger Catania focused on closing the "opportunity gap"—the unequal distribution of resources that makes smaller, rural districts hard-pressed to provide the same quality of education as more affluent, suburban peers.

He helped found the Educational Opportunity Fund, a non-profit that raises money for field trips, college visits and reading programs for Lake Placid students. He made sure students had access to advanced placement courses and programs for career and technical education. Most of all, he prepared graduating seniors to succeed.

"The gap in opportunities in school correlates highly with outcomes in life," Catania said, during a wide-ranging interview. "Poverty and inequality are at the root. But it doesn't mean there's nothing you can do. Schools need to provide opportunities students won't get otherwise."

Catania retired three years ago, but his work to ensure all children have access to enriching academic programs and extracurricular activities continues.

In 2022, Catania became the North Country's representative on the State Board of Regents, where he helps shape education policy statewide. On a board dominated by members from downstate, he has emerged as an effective advocate for small and rural schools while also keeping watch on the needs of students from big districts.

"Regent Catania knows more about the North Country and its small, rural schools than anyone else I know, and he regularly shares that knowledge and expertise with his colleagues on the Board of Regents and with the staff of the Education Department," said New York State Education Commissioner Betty Rosa in a statement. "At the same time, however, he understands that, as a Regent, he is responsible for establishing education policy for the entire State of New York and for all of its students."

The Regents has 17 board members elected by the state Legislature to five-year terms. Four serve at large. The rest hail from each of the state's 13 judicial districts.

Catania, 62, represents New York's fourth judicial district, a vast swath of territory stretching from Schenectady County to the Canadian border.

The board oversees all educational activities in New York, including private and public elementary and secondary schools, public and private colleges and universities, libraries and museums. As a Regent, Catania is involved with two of the state Education Department's most ambitious projects, both of which address his longtime concern: the opportunity gap.

One is a five-year effort to overhaul New York's graduation requirements. Called NY Inspires, it would replace New York's three diplomas with a single diploma and create multiple pathways to graduation.

Students could still take Regents exams to earn a diploma, but the tests would not be required. At a meeting discussing these changes, Catania said, "My old school counselor hat appreciates the simplification from three diploma types to one."

The other big project is a regionalization initiative asking districts throughout the state to work with their local Boards of Cooperative

Education Services (BOCES) to identify solutions to academic and operational challenges. Solutions might include sharing resources such as staff, extracurricular programs and support services. Driving this initiative is the fact that many New York schools have been forced to narrow their curriculum due to declining enrollment and increasing financial strain.

Most Adirondack school districts have experienced significant drops in attendance over the past two decades, a trend Catania has seen unfold firsthand. In 2013-2014, his Lake Placid district counted 657 students, according to state data; by 2022-2023, that number had dropped 18% to 538.

Regionalization is an attempt "to better understand what opportunities kids have and what opportunities they don't," Catania said. He said the process will empower school districts to develop plans that suit their needs. "It's their planning," he said. "It's not the (Education Department's) planning."

When Mary Dietrich first met Catania, she was a Lake Placid teacher, and he was the guidance counselor. Later, she served on the school board and was part of the team that hired him as superintendent in 2012 following a period of upheaval within the district. She is now a member of the Educational Opportunity Fund for the Lake Placid School District's board of directors; Catania is the board's president.

As superintendent, Catania emphasized that "sometimes there are roadblocks" that prevent students from taking full advantage of all the classes and programs available, Dietrich said. "That impacts their academic progress and creates an academic gap."

The college visits funded by the Educational Opportunity Fund target students who might be on the fence about higher education. "Some students have come back from that trip and said, 'You know, I never thought it was possible. I never thought it was something I wanted to do. But this is exciting,'" Dietrich said. "Some of those students have gone on to apply to college."

Cali Brooks got to know Catania when her daughter was a Lake Placid student. "He was our amazing school superintendent for many years, always standing outside welcoming the kids as they arrived at school and being friendly and engaging," she said.

Brooks is president of the Adirondack Foundation, where the Educational Opportunity Fund is based. She said she reaches out to Catania regularly for information on what's happening in education at the state level.

Roger Catania visits Newcomb Central School students. PHOTO COURTESY OF STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Right now, New York is reevaluating its Foundation Aid formula, which determines the majority of state education funding to schools. Any formula changes "could impact our communities in profound ways," Brooks said. "And (Catania) is there every day thinking about that on our behalf."

Catania will sometimes remind his Regents and Education Department colleagues that new mandates can be difficult for small schools to implement due to their limited staffing.

He recalled a meeting where the Regents approved a new rule requiring schools to certify that every high school senior completes the Free Application for Federal Student Aid or signs a waiver saying they or their parents have opted out. While a good rule, it is also a burden for small schools, Catania said.

"I'm not saying we shouldn't do it," Catania said. "I'm saying we continue to pile on, and at some point, these schools can't do it all. Some districts have one superintendent, one principal, a couple of administrative assistants, and they have to do everything."

Catania lives in Saranac Lake with his wife, Amy, the executive director of Historic Saranac Lake. The couple has two sons, ages 21 and 24.

Catania replaced Regent Beverly Ouderkirk, a longtime North Country educator who died with three years left on her term. He is up for re-election next year and wants another term.

Catania grew up in Scarsdale, a well-to-do suburb in Westchester County, and started his career downstate as a teaching assistant at Sleepy Hollow High School and a half-year position teaching social studies at a Catholic school in New York City.

In 1986, Catania accepted a job as a social studies teacher and basketball coach in the central Oregon community of Gilchrist. The school had been built in the late 1930s by a timber company, and when Catania arrived, Gilchrist was still a company-owned town.

"It was incredibly remote," Catania said.

His next teaching post was in Hillsboro, Ore., a big district, with a large population of immigrant families from Mexico and Central America. Catania enjoyed working there. But when Gilchrist called Catania and asked him to return as a guidance counselor, he jumped at the chance to return to rural America.

"I could help a kid if they had problems with their family," Catania said. "I could also work with them on what they wanted their life to become, whether that had to do with careers or future schooling. One of the biggest barriers kids face is they don't believe in themselves. Partially, that's because they haven't had a chance to see what's out there."

In 1997, Catania moved to Lake Placid to be the guidance counselor for middle and high school students. He had never been to Lake Placid before, but he knew he wanted to be at a rural district where he could be involved in all aspects of a school.

"We lose sight of the fact that we have this big country with small communities all over the place," he said. "Rural America has a lot of challenges. I was drawn to the fact that our kids have to make it in the modern world, but they are coming out of a not-so-modern experience."

In Gilchrist and Lake Placid, Catania coached basketball and developed his mentoring philosophy. His coaching career began when he was recruited while on leave from college, sick with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a blood cancer.

His high school coach brought him on as a volunteer assistant and later persuaded him to take over the freshmen boys' team. "I said, 'I can't do that. I'm on crutches,'" Catania said. "'I gave him all the reasons I couldn't do it and he just convinced me that I could. That's the kind of role model we all ought to be."

"Going through something like cancer is a wakeup call," Catania said. "It helped me gain a new perspective on life and the world. Getting involved in education became more meaningful to me, because it wasn't just about a job. It was about helping others and helping others change their lives." ■

SARA FOSS is a freelance writer in Albany.

For those who hike fairways

Golf courses provide views, jobs and four-season workouts

BY MARK MARCHAND

Satellite renderings of the Adirondack Park show unusually shaped patches of flat greenery amid the rugged mountains, vast forests and hundreds of lakes and ponds.

These sections, from 150 to about 500 yards long, are surrounded by trees and other flora. These odd parcels, their long swaths of greenery, their brighter circles of green at the end, and tiny areas of beach-like sand, are devoted to a sport that has grown in popularity since the 19th century and represents yet another reason over 12 million people visit the Adirondacks each year: Golf.

It provides employment and fosters tourism. And there is something special about golf in the park, avid golfers say.

The courses—some 32 parkwide—help attract visitors and serve as small economic engines that employ residents and generate tax revenue. While there's no specific accounting, the Adirondack courses helped boost tourism dollars in the area by 6.6% in 2023, according to the governor's office.

The manicured and maintained green spaces have benefits far beyond a sport involving hitting a small, hard ball the least number of times over 18 holes. The courses are often cherished by residents as preserves that provide picturesque views, short walks and outings with pets, even during the winter when golfers hibernate, and skiers take to the links.

Lou Reuter, who recently retired after nearly 30 years reporting on regional sports for the Adirondack Daily Enterprise, where he wrote a golf column, says two things separate Adirondack courses: stunning views and elevation changes.

"You play in the middle of some of the most scenic areas in the country and you can walk right on most courses without making a tee time," he said. "Every golf course I've played here offers different views of nature. … And the fairways here take you up and down hills and around corners, which makes you a better golfer and provides good exercise."

Sydney Aveson, of the Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism in Lake Placid, sees others values, including multiuse recreational opportunities year-round. Residents and visitors can hike or bike the Craig Wood Golf Course property, for instance, during the warm months and engage in a variety of cold-weather sports during the winter.

Aveson said golf has a rich Adirondack history, dating to the late 19th century when Europe's golf fascination crossed the ocean. Since then, 59 golf courses were built in the Adirondacks, according to a 2008 Wall Street Journal account. Courses were incorporated into the park's grand hotels and great camps. "By the turn of the century, many of the golf courses in the United States were located in the Adirondacks," Aveson said.

And these were no run-of-the-mill layouts. Famous or soon-to-be famous designers brought their expertise to the park. "Donald Ross, Seymour Dunn, Alexander Findley, Alister MacKenzie, Thomas Winton, and Augustus G. Paine made their mark in the region as notable architects of these courses," Aveson said.

Several courses were only nine holes, but many expanded to a full 18 during the 1920s and owners began building elaborate clubhouses and hosting events like weddings.

The sport suffered during the Great Depression and World War II, forcing some hotels to close. By the 1950s, many of the historic Adirondack courses were gone, along with resorts. But the sport bounced back, an apparent renaissance.

At the base of one of the Adirondacks' most famous skiing centers and alongside Lake Placid, players at the over 100-year-old Whiteface Club and Resort course walk or ride within rolling hills and fairways ensconced in dense patches of woods.

The course can be a taxing hike, but Whiteface Club's Head Golf Professional Perry Babcock said at least half the members of the public/private course—some of whom own property on the resort—skip the motorized cart in favor of walking.

From some parts of the 18-hole layout, golfers enjoy views of Whiteface Mountain's south side and evidence of a major rockslide from years ago.

Like many businesses in the Adirondacks and elsewhere, the pandemic and associated restrictions initially hit the golf business hard. But, according to Babcock, as residents of major metro areas temporarily or permanently moved to more wide-open spaces, golf became a refuge for those looking for outdoor sports and recreation. As the pandemic raged and before vaccine availability, golf courses joined the mini boom in real estate the region experienced.

"People could play golf and isolate at the same time," Babcock said. "It was not a hard sell."

In 2024, Whiteface completed one of the best seasons ever, Babcock said, aided by temperate weather. During the summer and cooler months, a resort inn, restaurant, event center and conference space helped provide a steady stream of revenue.

Babcock grew up across the street from the course and held several jobs at the club, including washing dishes. After college, he came back and has worked there ever since, serving for several years as assistant to former head pro J. Peter Martin. He became head pro three years ago when Martin retired. The course employs 15 people.

Across town at Lake Placid Club's 27 holes

Many fall golfers extended their seasons this year in warmer temperatures at Lake Placid Resort (top) and Saranac Lake Golf Course.
PHOTOS BY LOU REUTER

of golf, Head Golf Professional Jim Beauregard reports similar recent growth.

"The last two years have been great even though 2023 was rainy. Warmer weather did help add some rounds but our move to an online tee time reservation system this year really helped," Beauregard said. "We saw a dramatic increase in reservations." Rounds played on the courses were up about 15% in 2024, according to Art Lussi of the Crowne Plaza Hotel, which owns the Lake Placid Club.

A member of the Northeastern New York PGA and head pro for 11 years, Beauregard said that until recently the golf business in general was suffering. But, like Babcock, he said the pandemic fueled interest in an outdoor sport that requires players to spend over four hours outside. "We surfed that wave and have seen new players begin, as others who'd been away from the game for a while returned. We hope it continues." The club employs 20.

A more recent trend that has drawn more business to the Adirondacks and elsewhere are group outings, according to Beauregard, with as many as 20 participants. "They come here because there's so much else to do," he said. "After golfing they're off hiking or paddle boarding."

Beauregard also says his organization has established programs that expose more younger golfers to the game to spur lifelong players.

For any outdoor sport, though, changing weather patterns and severe weather fueled by human-caused climate change are an ongoing concern. August 2024 set a new monthly temperature record, capping Earth's hottest summer since global records began in 1880, according to NASA.

From the PGA at a national level to local courses, proactive sustainability and environmental protection efforts are underway.

"We have a program called minimal sustainable inputs," Beauregard said. "We use less herbicides, less pesticides and less water. We're just trying to use a bare minimum of resources."

But it's fervent golfers like Reuter who provide the best perspective on golf in the largest publicly protected area in the 48 states.

While his current post-newspaper job at the SL Hothouse Garden center in Saranac Lake keeps him away from the 30 rounds of golf he usually plays annually, he still frequents the park's courses and talks about the wildlife encountered.

A course he loved—Loon Lake Golf Course—is one of a few that have closed in modern times.

"It was only five bucks for all the golf you could play, and I could bring my dog with me." But his dog Marcy, a husky mix, could be distracted by the animals coming from the woods. "He would often see a fox and bolt off to chase him.

"Also, during the summer the black flies there were intense in the late afternoon. I'd hit my ball and run off after it to hit my next shot, to escape the flies. I did that over and over. It was quite a workout."

Other favorite courses Reuter plays include the Bluff Point Golf Course near Plattsburgh on Lake Champlain with "spectacular" views and a par 3 hole along the lake. He is high on the Tupper Lake Golf Course and the Saranac Inn Golf and Country Club and cites the Lake Placid Club and Whiteface Resort as among the more challenging layouts.

Golf in the Adirondacks is not immune to financial pressures. According to interviews and news reports, at least three courses are now scratched from the scene: Sacandaga Golf Course in Northville, Cedar River Golf Course in Indian Lake and Inlet Golf Course in Inlet.

Beauregard emphasized that greens fees aren't enough and clubs rely on dollars from merchandise, refreshments, banquets and other sources.

Adele Burnett, Inlet's tourism director, said the closure there happened as usual around Columbus Day in 2023. But the course, run by aging owners, never reopened.

The future of its acreage is a major local concern because no one knows if something might be built there. Proposals that would have the town take over and operate the course have been discussed but have not moved forward. "That's an expensive proposition for a community where only about 300 people live year-round," said Burnett.

Sandwiched between two lakes in the western region of the park, Inlet Golf Course was owned by the Lind family. It was often regarded by golfers and online golf sites as one of the more scenic spots in the region.

"It was a great asset for our area and was yet another reason to come here and experience our beautiful region," Burnett said. "The closing will be somewhat detrimental to our ability to attract people here." ■

INLET
GOLF CLUB
18 HOLE PUBLIC COURSE
MULLIGAN'S
BAR & GRILL
NY

Inlet Golf Club is among a trio of courses that closed recently for various reasons.
PHOTO BY CHLOE BENNETT

MARK MARCHAND is a freelance writer in Saratoga County.

Bear in Mind

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Collaborators with chainsaws

The ice carvers of Saranac Lake make art

BY TOM FRENCH

Today's ice carvers creating Saranac Lake's Ice Palace are artists with power saws who follow the guidance of an illustrator named "Doc."

"There was a guy trying to do a carving, and I said, 'Do you need some help?' So, I got my equipment, came back, and started carving," said John Ward, who joined the crew in 2017.

Ward retired from Saranac Lake High School as an art teacher in 2015 after 30 years. "The kids gave me the nickname, "Doc," and it stuck."

He's illustrated children's books, national magazines and U.S. Coast Guard material hung in the Capitol and around the world.

For ice sculpting, Ward said, "You take your artistic and sculpting skills and use a chainsaw instead of a knife with clay."

Ward has recruited many former students for carving at the winter carnival. "They're all professional artists now."

Sara Mazdzer, a 2010 graduate of Saranac Lake High School, holds a BFA in sculpture from the Pratt Institute and works in New York City designing interior spaces and art finishes for luxury retail stores such as Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Dior and Tiffany.

She also creates sculptures on commission. Her "Ephemeral Feeling, 2014," a 15-foot metal luger, hangs in the Big Slide Brewery and Public House in Lake Placid.

Ward reached out to his former student to join in the art for the Saranac Lake Winter Carnival and Mazdzer soon owned two chainsaws.

Growing up, she had hoped to pursue a career in dance, but was fascinated by the sculptures on the Plattsburgh College campus. "I really wanted to know how those were made. I tried to take a welding class freshman year, but was steered away—traditional gender roles, I guess. But I was persistent and enrolled the following fall semester sophomore year."

After a hip injury when she was 17, she sought another creative outlet. "I figured if I can't dance, I might as well go full steam ahead into art. Doc helped me get confident enough to do the welding program. I don't think any women or girls had done welding shop before me at the high school. He put it on my radar and pushed me and has been instrumental in my art career."

In addition to the Big Slide Brewery installation, Mazdzer has several pieces in private collections around the Adirondacks and over a dozen in New York City.

Ward explained the first step for creating a sculpture is piling a number of blocks into place. "The blocks weigh up to 600 pounds, so we slide them out of the bucket loader and put them where we want, jockeying them around with big pry bars to get them all flush and in place. Then we start carving. We did a Bigfoot or Sasquatch a few years back. I can't tell you how many blocks he was, but if he had stood up like a real person, he'd have been 10-feet tall."

He recruited former student Shawn Rohe at the grocery store.

The 2000 Saranac Lake graduate and alumnus of St. Lawrence University is a freelance artist with extensive experience gilding gold leaf onto boat transoms. He also works as a private chef. His clients have included Tom Cruise and high-end CEOs.

Rohe recalled avoiding a dinosaur tail and thigh when they collapsed his first year. "The ice can be brittle. But what's the worst that happens. It looks good in July."

Mazdzer said she's seen ice carving competitions and ice carving companies in New York City that prepare and freeze huge blocks of ice in very cold temperatures. "That ice is super clear, almost glass-like, for swans at banquets. Lake ice is inconsistent. It's completely Mother-Nature made. If it gets warm, whatever snow was on top melts a little bit. Then at night, it freezes. So, there's a very cloudy soft layer, and then it freezes. It's all these different layers, like a cake."

"It's usually the weather that gets us," Ward said. "We did the dinosaurs and they looked beautiful. Two days later, it was 40 degrees and rain. One of the heads just melted off and it was gone."

Every year, the team carves interactive sculptures that people can climb into for pictures. In 2022, the team fashioned the DeLorean time machine from "Back to the Future."

2020's myths and legends theme involved flying saucers. Last year's "Creepy Carnival" featured spooky bumper cars crashing into each other.

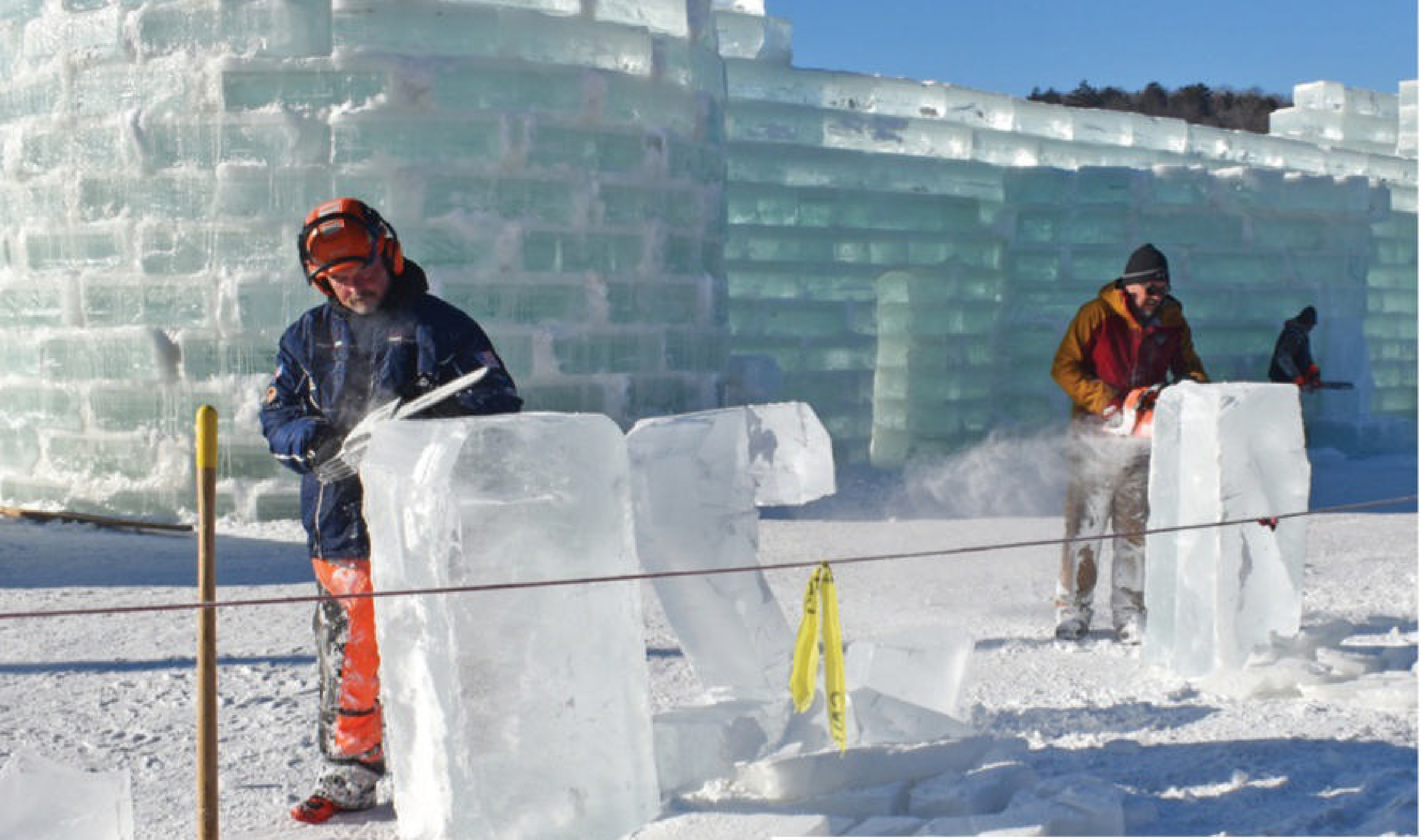
"Each big sculpture has many collaborators," Ward said. The DeLorean and the Flying Saucer each had a team of at least five.

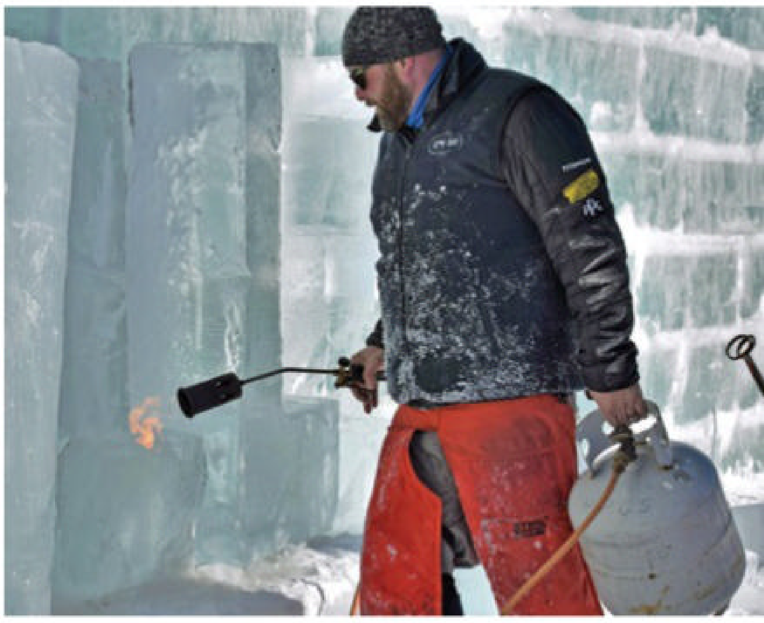
Mazdzer recalled her joy in making a triceratops and "bringing it to life."

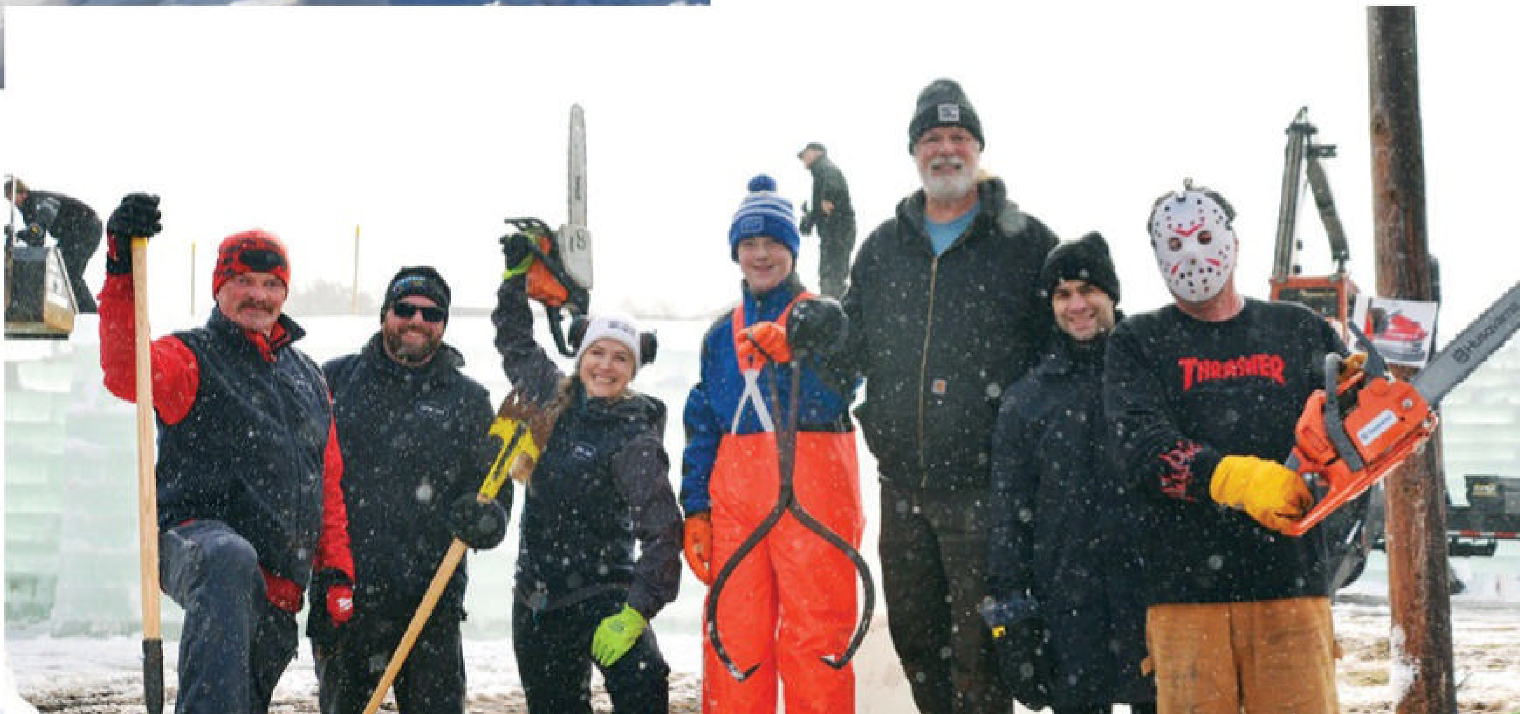
Warmer temperatures from climate change may make ice carving go the way of the dinosaurs. A year may arrive when it won't be safe to harvest ice from Lake Flower's Pontiac Bay.

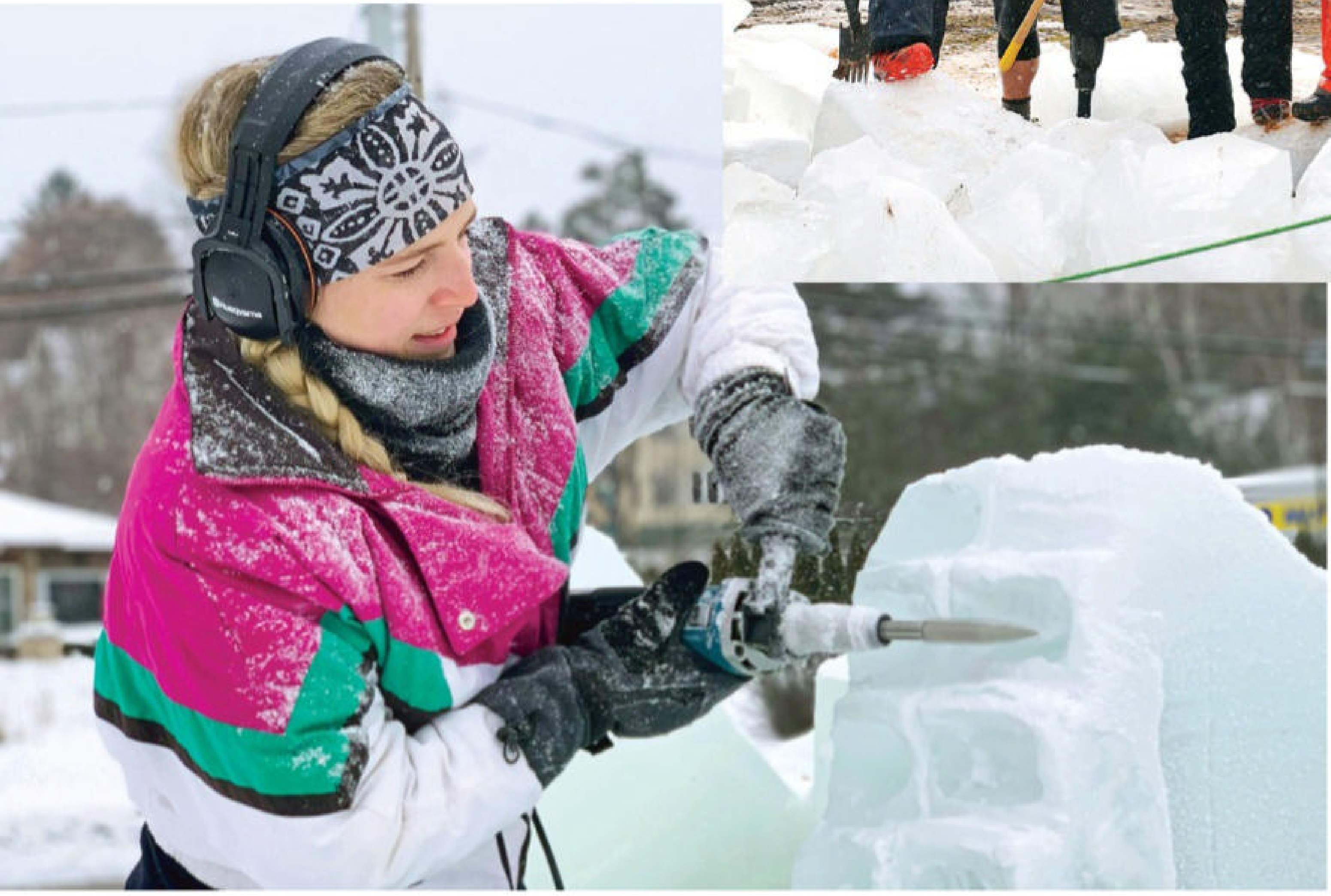
"I'm going to try to do it as much as I can until then," Mazdzer said. ■

TOM FRENCH is a freelance writer and photographer from Potsdam.









Clockwise from bottom left: **Sara Mazdzer uses a custom die grinder with special ice carving bit on a "Back to the Future" DeLorean time machine for the 2022 Saranac Lake Winter Carnival.** PHOTO BY KATE MAZDZER **Shawn Rohe adds detail to a throne.** PHOTO BY MEACHELE MANCHESTER **John "Doc" Ward and Corey Pandolph carve numbers.** PHOTO BY TOM FRENCH **Shawn Rohe melts snow on the ice to make it crystal clear. The carvers show their tools, from left, John Ward, Shawn Rohe, Sara Mazdzer, Blake Rohe. Dan King, Stefan Molinaro and Corey Pandolph.** PHOTOS BY MEACHELE MANCHESTER Opposite Page: **Sasquatch overlooks the site of the 2020 "Myths and Legends" carnival.** PHOTO BY JOHN WARD

The big why

BY LISA BALLARD

Lisa Ballard climbs in Ouray, Col.
PHOTO BY ANGELA HAWES

Humans are wired for fight-or-flight response. When in danger, our bodies produce adrenaline, which helps us confront a threat either head on or by quickly retreating.

Call it a survival instinct. I prefer "performance predisposition" particularly for people, like me, who are predisposed toward mountain adventures that are physically and mentally challenging. I'm not reckless. I know my skills and my limits. What you consider extreme might be within my comfort zone and vice versa.

For example, several years ago, I admonished my son to be careful when I learned he was doing avalanche control work at a ski area in the Rocky Mountains. "You run downhill!" he said to me. "I should worry about you."

Age 63, I still race in downhills on the masters ski racing circuit. I love going fast on skis, a passion I found in the 1970s in the junior racing program at Whiteface Mountain.

Different people tolerate different levels of risk. I'm on the higher end of that spectrum and not just on skis. The Adirondacks was my training ground for several risky pursuits such as ice climbing, rock climbing, even hiking, depending on the route. My High Peaks experiences not only tested me, but also gave me the skills and confidence to explore various places around the globe.

When climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania in 2009, I could have ascended one of the standard tourist routes. Instead, I opted for the Western Breach, a former ice climbing route that had just reopened. Now devoid of ice due to climate change, our team had to get through this precarious, vertical boulder field before the sun hit it, causing it to spit rocks like deadly, giant watermelon pits. Imagine my relief when I reached Africa's rooftop.

Why do some of us do such things? When asked why he wanted to climb Mount Everest, the legendary mountaineer George Mallory responded, "because it's there." Mallory paid the ultimate price for his determination to be the first to reach the top of the world's highest peak, yet his oft-quoted words live on as the rationale for adventure-seekers. The debate whether Mallory should have turned back just below the summit as clouds engulfed him still rages 100 years later. Some consider Mallory a hero. Others say he was an over-confident egoist, blinded by his goal.

In 2002, when I was a reporter during the Winter Goodwill Games, my cameraman and I snowshoed up Owls Head near Keene for a story on the beauty of the Adirondack Park. Upon returning to the broadcast center in Lake Placid, my producer killed the feature and sent me to the hospital to report on four backcountry skiers rescued from an avalanche on Mount Marcy. All but one died. Were they reckless? Maybe, but sometimes accidents happen despite taking every precaution. Like Mallory on Everest, those skiers took a calculated risk and lost their bet with Mother Nature. It happens.

When I summited Kilimanjaro, luckily, there were many rewards. I touched rocks that few others had. The views were jaw-dropping. I witnessed the eruption of nearby Mount Meru from above. The camaraderie among my fellow climbers laid the foundation for lifelong friendships. It was my first time over 19,000 feet. I stood on disappearing glaciers that future climbers won't, and I photographed rare flora endemic only to Kilimanjaro.

Yet one of my climbing partners nearly succumbed to acute mountain sickness and had to immediately leave the summit while the rest of us camped there. I underestimated the cold and became dangerously hypothermic while trying to photograph the ashpit, the part of the crater that's still active. Our remaining guide recognized my condition, led me back to a tent and put me in a sleeping bag, staving off another potentially deadly situation. We faced biting ants, pervasive volcanic dust, pelting hail, pouring rain, scorching sun and a quadricep-crushing 12,000 foot descent.

When backcountry skiing in Yellowstone National Park with a half-dozen other experienced skiers, I broke with Mallory. Our goal was to skin up Top Notch Peak without a guide, then ski back to the road. My mood was jovial, that is, until we reached the bottom of a cirque below the summit ridge. It looked inviting except some snow had recently tumbled down part of the cirque's steep face. Everyone eagerly plowed ahead.

I turned around. Something didn't feel right, causing the hairs on the back of my neck to itch. Another experienced Everest climber once told me to listen to those neck hairs. Luckily, everyone made it back. But, the bowl slid that evening.

There's something in human DNA that urges us to explore and push our limits. I value the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction I get when I stand on a summit. My closest friendships are those with whom I explore the backcountry. Not everyone is going to climb Everest, Kilimanjaro or even Marcy. For some, stepping onto any trail is adventurous, but we usually go "because it's there," and because we fully intend to make it home again. ■

Last fall, the Outdoor Writers Association of America honored Lisa Ballard with the Joan Wulff Enduring Excellence Award for career achievements.

LISA BALLARD is a Chateaugay Lake-based author who contributes to numerous national and regional publications.

WE PROTECT FRESH WATER WITH FRESH THINKING

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This is a critical time for conservation, and we need creative solutions. Freshwater ecosystems are some of the most threatened on Earth. And a new study by Cornell University found that only 5% of Adirondack lakes may continue to maintain water that is cold and oxygenated enough to support cold-water fish.

Now, through a historic agreement with New York State, The Nature Conservancy is creating a freshwater research preserve at Follensby Pond to conserve and study this freshwater marvel. Follensby will be both a living laboratory and a lifeboat for cold-water species in the face of climate change, informing freshwater conservation around the world.

Learn more at **nature.org/Follensby**.

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The Nature Conservancy

Figuring out the way

Tech gear makes it easier to get back safely

BY NEIL WOODWORTH

My wife and I enjoy hiking off trail in the Five Ponds Wilderness just out the back door from our home in the northwest Adirondacks. For our bushwhacking adventures, we use a paper topographic map, a compass and a handheld global positioning receiver (GPSR). Let me tell you about the equipment and methods that help us in backcountry navigation.

I am motivated by safety concerns: Holly and I were hiking off-trail in a remote part of Five Ponds. I injured my back on a steep descent. We used the Garmin GPS handheld and the Suunto compass to take a more direct route back to our campsite, saving several miles and a lot of painful walking. I was able to hike home after a night of rest.

We use a couple of devices with a retail cost that runs from $565 to $665.

One device is a $65 Suunto baseplate compass with the magnetic needle inside a liquid filled capsule. The compass can be adjusted using a small brass key to set the 13-degree difference between magnetic and true north in our part of the Adirondack Park.

Centering the red compass needle between the two fluorescent marks on the compass ensures that the compass' direction of travel works with our GPS or handheld receiver, which costs $500 to $600. I recommend customized United States Geological Survey topographic maps from MyTopo that can be ordered for a specified area on waterproof and foldable paper. I highly recommend the book "Be Expert with Map and Compass" by Bjorn Kjellstrom.

Many hikers navigate with applications like Gaia GPS and All Trails on their smartphones. I do not recommend this.

Cellular phones are too fragile for backcountry travel, especially in wet and cold weather. Cell phone batteries quickly drain compared to the battery life of a dedicated Garmin handheld GPSR unit.

Cell phone batteries are designed for temperatures in the 60s and 70s. The battery duration drops quickly as the temperature drops. My recommendation for a GPSR is the Garmin

Five Ponds Wilderness
GARMIN
FIND
MARK
QUIT
PAGE
MENU
ENTER

Neil Woodworth checks on his location with his handheld positioning device, shown bottom left.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY NEIL WOODWORTH

GPSMAP 67 (I). Its internal battery has a duration of 130 to 165 hours depending on how you use it.

You can transfer All Trails or GAIA routes to your Garmin GPS receiver using Garmin Connect. I prefer a handheld GPSR over a GPS watch because of the significantly larger screen to view maps in the field and the abundant choice of navigation features. The user manuals for these devices are freely available online and I recommend reading them before purchasing.

The 67 (I) has a bright 3-inch diagonal color screen to view digital maps. The 67 (I) can access GPS and European Galileo systems for very accurate positioning, often within 6 feet. Its ability to use multi-band signals ensures this accuracy even under the heavy summer foliage of the Adirondacks.

The Garmin 67 (I) GPS receiver has an electronic compass that correctly shows your direction of travel even when you are stationary.

The 67 (I) has a shielded SOS button which uses Garmin's Iridium satellite network and InReach messaging service to communicate with search-and-rescue personnel and family by text or e-mail. There is a monthly $15 charge for InReach messaging service. You can choose the subscription that best meets your needs.

The 67 (I) is sold with Garmin TopoActive maps. It has the ability to download other topographic maps using a subscription service. I find that the Topoactive maps lack enough detail for backcountry off-trail use.

However, I have been able to use Garmin's custom map feature to put US Geological Survey quadrangle maps on the 67(I). I have used the website GPSFileDepot to download My-Trails software, which displays state marked trails in New York on my GPSR. I use digital mapping software programs such as Topofusion or ExpertGPS to place scaleable USGS maps on my 67.

I use the map manager menu to display the USGS topographic map as the base map with marked hiking trails superimposed on the 67 (I). You can use ExpertGPS to create waypoints (electronic bread crumbs) to create a route and then transfer these waypoints to the GPSR. After your adventure, you can transfer your actual track from the GPS receiver to view on your computer. You can even draw a route on ExpertGPS and transfer it or a series of waypoints to your GPSR to follow in the field.

Typically, I create a route using a series of waypoints. I navigate from waypoint to waypoint in the field. Usually, Holly hikes in front using the compass. I give her the course in degrees, she selects an aiming point and walks until we reach that waypoint. We repeat the process until we reach the destination. Typically, the route uses trails whenever possible. Off trail, our route doglegs around water bodies, cliffs and wetlands.

Garmin's SOS function is a distress message to search-and-rescue professionals that summons help and gives your exact location. The Garmin SOS uses Garmin's Iridium satellites, so it does not depend on cellular coverage or wifi. You can send a text message to give rescuers details on your emergency. ■

NEIL WOODWORTH, formerly the Adirondack Mountain Club executive director, lives in Wanakena.
PHOTO BY KARA DRY

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An ideal outing in any season

Explore the bog's ecology, feed the friendly birds while hiking, biking or skiing

BY TIM ROWLAND

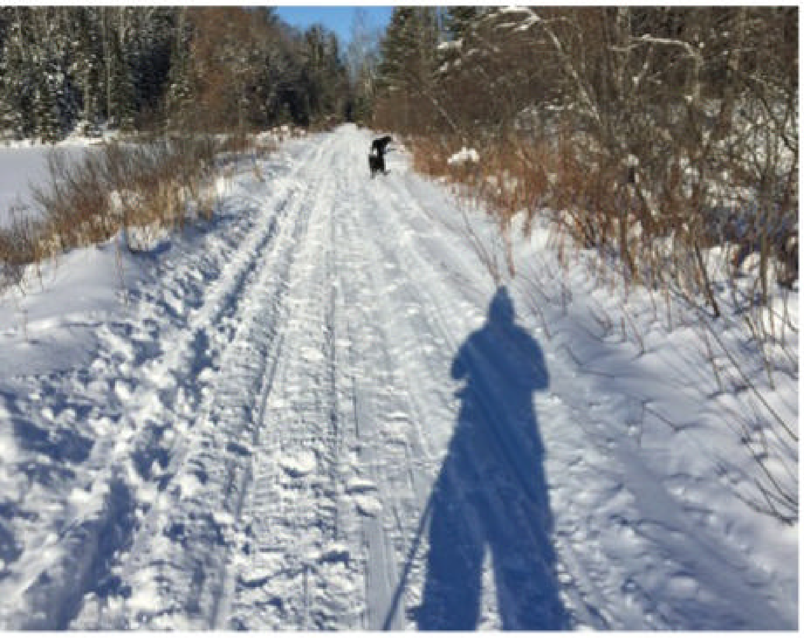
The Bloomingdale Bog trail is one of those slow, relaxed strolls, flat and undemanding, that locals have typically used to work off Sunday brunch.

It was a rail trail before there was the Adirondack Rail Trail, although today it seems more commonly hiked than biked. Since it is Adirondack Rail Trail-adjacent, however, it may become a bit more of an opportunity for cyclists who have ridden the Tupper Lake-to-Lake Placid route and want something more.

Hikers can take comfort that, unlike the more popular rail trail to the south, it contains natural speed bumps (roots, ditches, ballast) that discourage nuisance-level speed. It also is great for skiing.

The Bloomingdale Bog trail, originally a line of the Delaware & Hudson Railway, runs from Route 86, 2.5 miles north of Saranac Lake to Route 55, 1.5 miles west of the four-way stop in Bloomingdale.

The Bloomingdale Bog trail is relatively flat. PHOTO BY BRENDAN WILTSE



The bog trail is used by both snowmobilers and cross-country skiers in winter. PHOTO BY KELLY HOFSCHNEIDER

The official 3.7-mile (one way) sojourn is easily accomplished in the shortened daylight of fall and winter. I say "official" because the rail bed continues in either direction running from Saranac Lake to Onchiota. But as the name suggests, it is the Bloomingdale Bog that makes this section special.

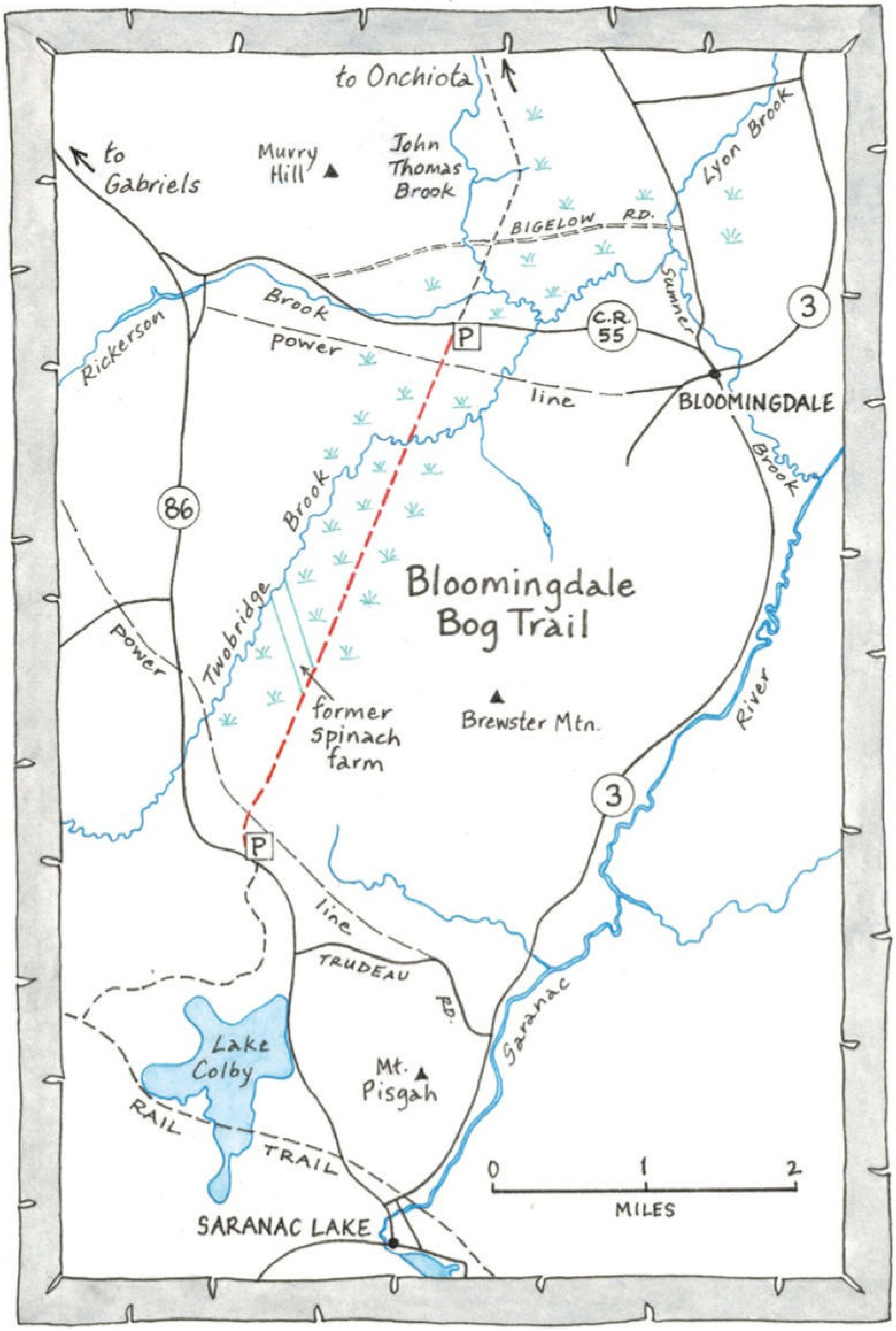
It is a series of bogs and fens that together comprise one of the largest such areas in New York despite having been abused by the hand of man in the forms of roads, railways, power lines and a producer who tried to turn it into a spinach farm. For a fantastic explanatory video and drone footage, visit the Northern Forest Atlas.

If you don't have time to hike the whole thing, I suggest parking at the Route 55 trailhead and hiking south since most of the boggy goodness tends to be weighted to the north-middle of the trail, along with the Canada jays that with very little coaxing will land in the palm of your hand.

Before the snow flies, when the mountains take on that flaccid, vaguely pinkish cast of gray—what the interior designers call "Ashes of Roses" but to me are more the color of drowned mice—the Bloomingdale Bog has color, contrast and visual interest superior to many late-fall hikes.

In November, my wife Beth and I pedaled from the Route 55 trailhead through a comely evergreen forest that soon began to give way to marshlands studded with the black spruce and bog plants that can somehow make a living in this low-nutrient environment.

Cross Twobridge Brook, an attractive site


to Onchiota
to Gabriels
Murry Hill
John Thomas Brook
Lyon Brook
BIGELOW RD.
Rickerson Brook
Power line
P
C.R. 55
Sumner
3
BLOOMINGDALE
Brook
86
Twobridge Brook
Bloomingdale Bog Trail
Power line
former spinach farm
Brewster Mtn.
River
3
P
line
TRUDEAU RD.
Saranac
Lake Colby
Mt. Pisgah
RAIL TRAIL
0
1
2
MILES
SARANAC LAKE

MAP BY NANCY BERNSTEIN

where the still waters meander among tawny marsh grasses. Low mountains appear in the distance, as balsam, tamarack and cedar cling to the side of the old railbed, and after a time you become conscious of a presence—nothing you can put your finger on at first, but little shadows flitting across your peripheral vision.

Soon enough you will realize that these shadows have an agenda, and it involves food. They are Canada jays that will keep pace with you from a distance at first as they perform an avian background check, and if you are the nonmalignant sort, they will soon close in and "head you off at the pass" in a shakedown kind of way, so if you have brought a little seed they will land on your fingers and eat from your outstretched palm.

Leaving these avian panhandlers behind, we proceeded south where the bog widens to its full expanse. Here the thin forest jousts with the wetlands for purchase and a long and prosperous life, sometimes succeeding, sometimes not.

Dead, skeletal trunks and limbs rise from the still waters in a ghostly way, somewhat resembling the masts and rigging of a long-ago sunken fleet. Elsewhere, mature black spruce is getting by somehow, tattered boughs and poodle-like tufts of needles on long thin trunks are evidence of trees that are making do, but that's about it.

The trail views include the waterways of the boggy area. PHOTO BY TIM ROWLAND

Then, young and optimistic, bright green cones about the size of Christmas trees pop through the marsh grasses, oblivious to the hard lessons learned by their elders.

These vignettes are inversely duplicated in the still black water, which reflects the trees along with the blue skies, yellow grasses and the rusty complexion of bog plants.

It never would have occurred to me to lay a train track through the middle of such a watery, spongy environment as this, but if the alternative is blowing through a mountain flank you do what you must.

Toward the south, beavers have created the need for chunky rock fill covered to varying degrees of success with fine gravel. With the ride turning bumpy, we turned around here, avoiding another half-mile through beaver marshes and mixed hardwood forest to the southern trailhead on Route 86.

The return was more enjoyable with the low, piercing sun behind us, and safer too, since we could see roots and other flotsam and jetsam that we'd been blind to on our way south. Even so, in several spots we got off and walked our bikes just so we could savor the splendid scene. ■

TIM ROWLAND is a columnist, author and outdoors writer living in Jay.

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN TO BIG TUPPER NEXT?

Could hotel taxes help?

The recent acquisition of Big Tupper offers a unique opportunity to establish a year-round destination that harmonizes the natural landscape with various sporting activities.

The mountain has been effectively closed for nearly 30 years, during which outdoor recreational activities have surged in popularity, particularly in the wake of the pandemic, with many evolving into professional sports.

Unfortunately, the climate conditions have hindered the natural snowfall necessary for a sustainable business model, prompting a need for change.

The rise of competitive sports, including mountain biking and trail running, has led to the formation of organizations such as the Pro Downhill Series and UCI. Pickleball, disc golf and hiking have also gained traction.

This trend should inspire optimism among Big Tupper's new owners and the community, as it raises the question of why Tupper Lake cannot be a prime venue for regional or major events.

Reflecting on my childhood mountain bike racing at Pioneer Farms, which fostered regional interest and local business, it is evident that similar potential exists for Big Tupper. The success of mountain biking events in nearby locations, such as Killington and Lake Placid, further underscores this potential.

Big Tupper could transform into a premier "outdoor playground" for enthusiasts globally, enhancing Tupper Lake's reputation. I acknowledge the new owners of the mountain need to engage with the community respectfully and the costs borne by the new owners.

This requires decisive action from Franklin County's Tourism, Advisory Committee, Franklin County Legislature, Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism, and Local Enhancement and Advancement Fund and other entities responsible for managing tourism funding from occupancy taxes. (Essex County, Franklin County and Hamilton County generate over $7.5 million annually).

An "open mountain" scenario is far more desirable than a "closed mountain." However to effectively attract competitive outdoor enthusiasts and significant events akin to those organized by Big Tupper's neighbor, the Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA), it is essential for those overseeing the occupancy tax to allocate these funds, like ORDA's use of state funding for event attraction and venue maintenance in Lake Placid.

It can be argued that the financial burden of such initiatives should not fall on private owners, especially when their activities contribute to a greater economic impact in the region through increased taxes, dining and retail sales.

Think of the marketing slogans: "Come Play Tupper." "Roam Free," "Live Life Elevated," "Nature's Playground Awaits." ■

Sports and entertainment consultant, CEO of The Diff Agency, **NEIL FORTIER,** was raised in the Tri-Lakes Region and is chairman of North Country Sports Council.

Big Tupper covered in snow. PHOTO BY RICK GODIN

Community support of new owners is correct

Big Tupper Ski Area symbolizes a community spirit and represents the shared values, cooperation and collective energy of a large group of people that extend well beyond the Adirondack Park. It embodies a sense of belonging, mutual support and the willingness to work together for the greater good. It is part of the fabric of Tupper Lake and further symbolizes pride, solidarity and a commitment to helping one another thrive.

Known for its scenic beauty, family-friendly atmosphere and a rich history that dates to the mid-20th century, it first opened in the early 1960s to boost winter tourism. It was a popular destination for both local and visiting skiers, offering well-maintained slopes and a vibrant community atmosphere.

With a vertical drop of approximately 1,200 feet, Big Tupper offered a mix of trails for beginners to advanced skiers, making it a ski destination in the Adirondacks. The ski area experienced multiple closures due to shifting markets and financial struggles. It has been closed and reopened several times, with notable community efforts to revive the resort through volunteer support. And now there is new hope.

The new owners have shared their hopes of reviving the ski area with additional uses. By getting the ski area operational again, and working toward a four-season use, the impact would be positive.

A functioning ski area would attract winter tourists, increasing demand for lodging, restaurants and other local businesses. It would also provide seasonal and year-round employment opportunities, from ski instructors to maintenance workers to support staff in the service industry. With the increased interest in Tupper Lake as a destination, it could boost property values and lead to additional housing initiatives.

Other positive impacts would include youth engagement that would promote healthy lifestyles and foster community pride that would create more attention for private investment.

The area could host mountain biking, hiking, and other activities in warmer months, broadening its appeal and thus the positive economic impact. And, by promoting sustainable practices, it could also attract environmentally conscious travelers.

The reopening of Big Tupper has the potential of creating regional impacts by leveraging partnerships with other Adirondack communities and amplifying the ski area's impact and creating shared promotional campaigns.

By engaging the community and region as part of the redevelopment efforts, the outcome will be positive for the everyone involved. Tupper Lake and the surrounding region is ready to ski Big Tupper again. ■

JIM LAVALLEY, a Tupper Lake real estate broker, resides in Tupper Lake.

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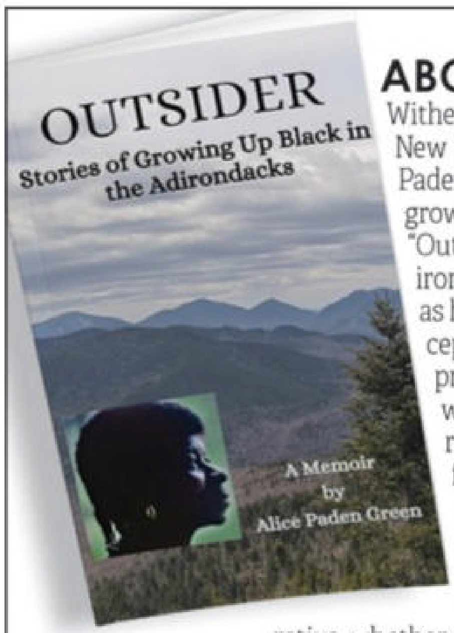

ABOUT THE BOOK

Witherbee is a hamlet in the Adirondack Park in New York State and the place where author Alice Paden Green learned a harsh reality about race, growing up Black in a predominantly white area. "Outsider: Stories of Growing Up Black in the Adirondacks" details many of Green's experiences as her family grappled with poverty, race and acceptance in the mid-20th century. This memoir, prompted by a recent gathering of Blacks and whites in the Adirondacks for a discussion on race relations, explores perceptions of Black families in the 1950s and '60s and whether Blacks are still viewed as outsiders or welcomed with open arms in this four-season, recreational playground still dominated by white residents. This book adds to the narrative whether more work should be done to diversify the Adirondack regions and can be used by individuals, groups, and government agencies to further those discussions.

Available at
amazon.com | BARNES & NOBLE | CFLJ.org

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alice Paden Green was the executive director of the Center for Law and Justice, a civil rights organization she founded in 1985 in Albany, New York. For nearly 40 years, the Center has been the foremost change agent in working to transform policies, practices and people in the areas of social justice, criminal justice and prison reform.

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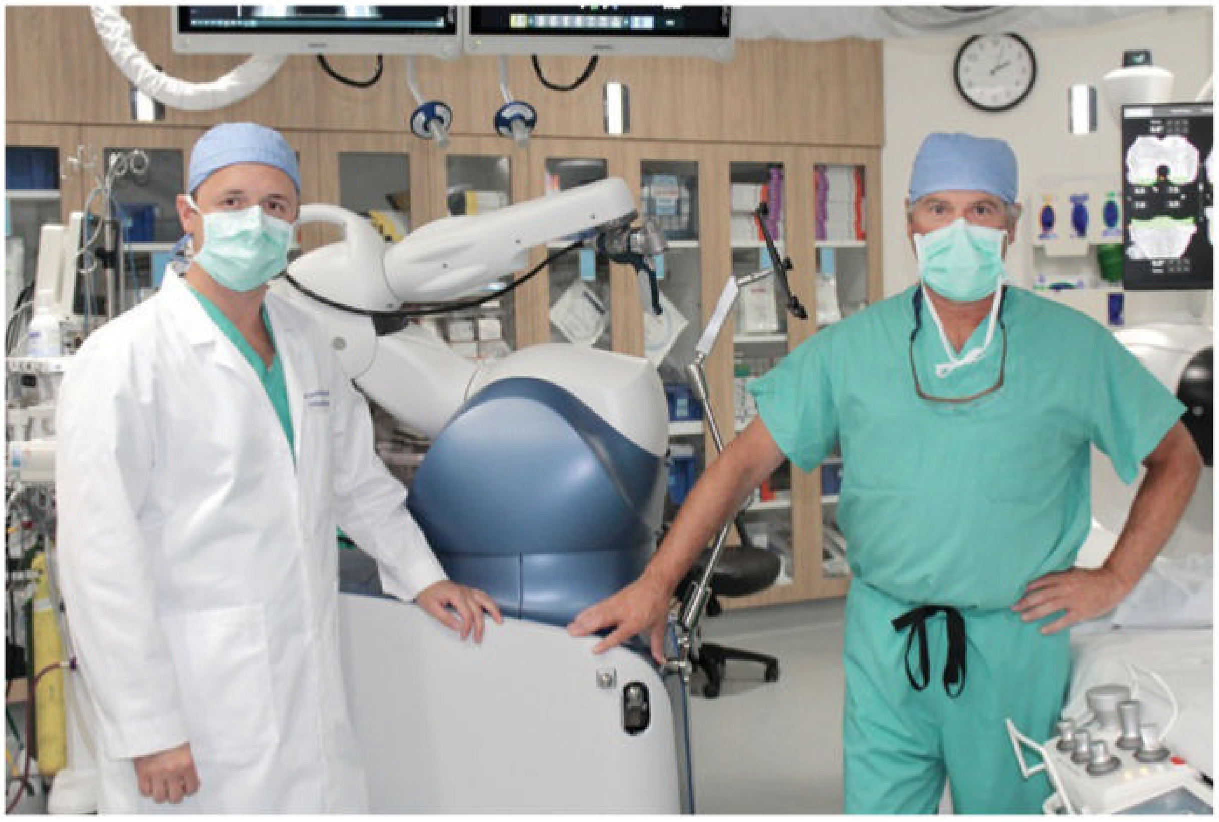

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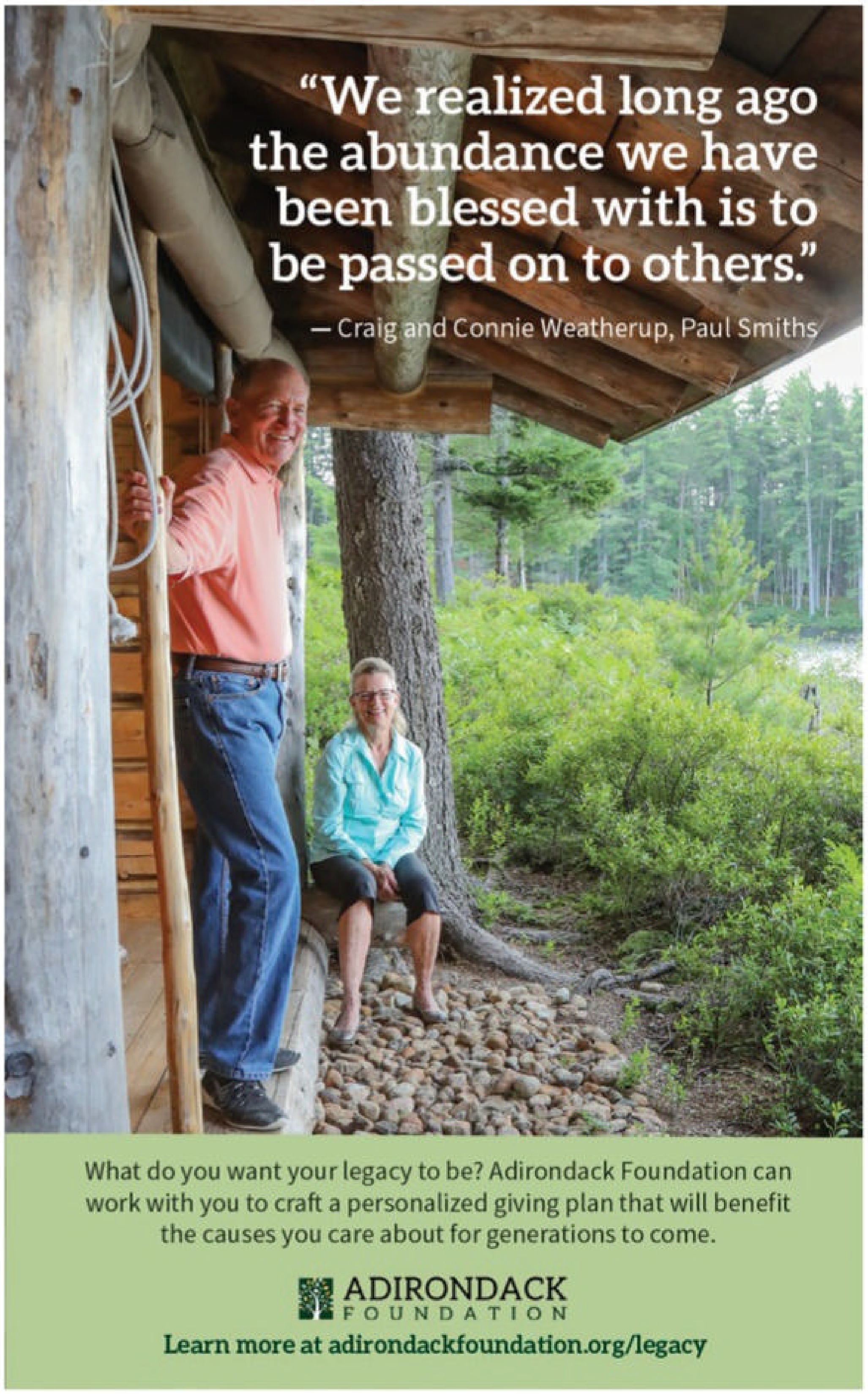

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An American history trip

BY KLARISSE TORRIENTE

Klarisse Torriente, second from right, with Christie Williams, Julian Torriente, Eugenio Torriente and Christopher Ross at Seminoe State Park, Wyoming. PHOTO COURTESY OF KLARISSE TORRIENTE

It was eight days in a van and seven days camping with my family through the American heartland: Colorado, South Dakota, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. The idea for this trip came from my father, a Black, Cuban, retired DEA officer from the Bronx who had never camped a day in his life.

Each night I had to remind him to lower his voice. By the fourth night, annoyed at his loudness, I asked him if he was afraid of the quiet. He said, "yes." He wore bear spray on a holster like he was on a beat.

The man who was so excited to see Mount Rushmore spent far more time at the Crazy Horse Memorial. We learned the Indigenous history absent from Dad's parochial school curriculum in the 1970s, and from mine in public school in the 1990s. This trip had a theme of relearning history and realizing as a family how the colonization of the land decimated the American ecology and its people.

When it was not my turn to drive, I read Alice Green's memoirs, and wrote my previous article about the Albany-based civil rights activist who grew up in Witherbee. I could not miss the parallels between this trip and her upbringing engaging with white people in the Adirondacks. Like Dr. Green, my family and I met wonderful, kind and welcoming humans. We also met many people who made us feel like anomalies.

The lack of local diversity throughout the heartland was startling. On the road we encountered six other Black people, and two were truck drivers. We visited popular tourist attractions: Custer State Park, Grand Teton, Yellowstone and the Badlands. We were so obviously minorities. People stared at us everywhere we went.

In Yellowstone, a drunken Texan named TC, in his 40s, approached our fire with his dog, Cooter, to get some warmth. He spent an hour telling stories of his life in the South. Pulling beers out of endless pockets, TC seemed harmless, and sometimes hilarious—until he started using words like "coon" and "spic" when referencing Black and Mexican people.

The Jim Crow Museum of Racist History, which I hope to visit some day when in Michigan, describes "coon" as "one of the most insulting of all anti-Black caricatures. ... the coon was portrayed as a lazy, easily frightened, chronically idle, inarticulate, buffoon."

TC's casual racism is a reminder how easy and frequent it is to dehumanize Black and Brown people, a reminder that some of my fellow Americans still find me inferior and fail to understand our individual humanities.

In the West, the Adirondack Park and across the United States there are so many races, cultures and classes of people who don't socialize or befriend one another. Also, people learn about different groups from whatever they consume in the media.

I think these are some of many reasons people are emboldened to stare, use racist language, or assume the worst from people they do not know. This behavior stems from slavery and systemic racism.

The weekend after I returned to New York, I hiked Snowy Mountain in Indian Lake with two friends, one of whom was Black.

As we approached the trailhead around noon on Oct. 12, a woman delineated the importance of registering and picked up the pencil to show us how to do it. She continued to explain to us the trail and the park. What made her think we needed her input?

On that same hike, we were told by a man it was too late to summit. We passed about 20 people before that. I wondered what he said to them. These encounters made us feel like people thought we did not know what we were doing, that we were ignorant without even a conversation.

My heart wants to believe that the woman wanted to be a steward of the land, that her approach was kind and misguided. I have empathy for people who want to help others. I think there are more people who want to than not. Empathy is what drove Indigenous ally, sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski, to build the Crazy Horse monument and abolitionist John Brown to conduct on the Underground Railroad.

Encountering people who talk and act like TC and the people on the trail at Snowy Mountain is the norm for me. I travel a lot and spend most of my free time recreating. I also love meeting new people and hearing their stories.

I hope people will seek out more stories of others. But there are many Black people who could spend time outside but choose not to. I know one reason why. Even with my years hiking, camping and snowboarding, I still fear how people will treat me and people I bring outdoors.

I do not know what I would do if someone said or did something racist directly to my father, brother or friend. These are anxieties I live with. ■

KLARISSE TORRIENTE is an outdoor columnist for the Explorer.

A rock climb, not a hike

BY PHIL BROWN

Over the past 15 years, forest rangers made more than a dozen rescues of climbers at the Trap Dike or its adjacent slides on Mount Colden. They've also retrieved two bodies.

In the latest incident, in October, three rangers came to the aid of two climbers from Quebec stuck on a wet, steep slide. Flown into the area by helicopter, the rangers climbed the dike, rappelled the slide, lowered the climbers down the dike and hiked out with them. The rescue took nearly 12 hours.

One reason for the frequency of rescues may be that the Trap Dike is rated as a fourth-class climb—a classification between easy scrambling and roped rock climbing. The mountaineering bible "Freedom of the Hills" defines fourth-class terrain thus: "Simple climbing, often with exposure. A rope is often used. A fall could be fatal."

The book rightly emphasizes the risk. Nevertheless, some people, perhaps ignorant of the definition, underestimate the difficulties of the Trap Dike. It is not a simple scramble. In fact, it can be argued that it should be rated fifth class—"where rock climbing begins in earnest," according to "Freedom of the Hills." Typically, people tie into a rope for such climbs.

Fifth-class climbing ranges from 5.0 (very easy) to 5.15 (extremely difficult). I have climbed the Trap Dike many times and often thought that a few moves might be considered easy fifth class. Also, the lower section of the Irene Slide, which leads from the dike to Colden's summit, is as steep as some fifth-class pitches on Chapel Pond Slab, a popular rock-climbing destination near Keene Valley.

Difficulty ratings are notoriously subjective and a frequent source of debate. Some might think that raising the Trap Dike's rating amounts to a watering down of standards. Yes, it's a borderline case, but why not err on the side of caution? A fifth-class rating would force people to take the Trap Dike more seriously and either prepare accordingly or opt for a different adventure.

Will Roth, president of the Adirondack Climbers Coalition, wants the Trap Dike/Irene Slide rated as a fifth-class climb. It was a conversation with him that inspired this column.

A professional rock-climbing guide, Will often leads clients up the dike and the slide to the summit. He and his client are roped up for much of the route and wear harnesses and helmets. As they ascend, Will clips the rope to protective gear just as he would for any rock climb.

Although it's possible to avoid fifth-class terrain inside the dike, Will said, that's not always possible or even advisable. When the dike is wet, as it often is, climbers may feel safer on fifth-class terrain that's dry. Also, if climbers are unfamiliar with the route, they may wander into fifth-class terrain unintentionally.

As for the Irene Slide, Will said fifth-class climbing is unavoidable. The difficulty depends on which line you take. Will thinks the easiest line is 5.0, but others can be as hard as 5.5. (The most popular routes on Chapel Pond Slab are rated 5.5.) He once saw a trail runner tumble 25 feet to the bottom of the slide. "He landed in a heap on the ground. I can't believe he didn't break himself," he said.

Will has noticed a big increase in Trap Dike traffic over the years. "It used to be I would almost never see anyone," he said. "Now it's not uncommon to see one or two other parties." Many of the climbers seem inexperienced, "one step away from a serious injury or a fatality."

Top: **Hiker Philip Brittan nears the top of the Irene Slide above the Trap Dike.** PHOTO BY PHIL BROWN. Left: **The author climbs the dike.** PHOTO BY JOSH WILSON

The Trap Dike now falls into a gray zone. It certainly isn't a hike, but is it a hard scramble or a rock climb? It's like a Rorschach Test: people who have read about the Trap Dike online or heard about it second-hand will see in those accounts what they want to see. If they're gung-ho but lack climbing experience, they're apt to downplay the difficulty.

Let's dispel the ambiguity. The rating in guidebooks and in apps such as Mountain Project should be changed. The Trap Dike/Irene Slide route is neither a hike nor a simple scramble. It's a rock climb. Be forewarned and be prepared. ■

PHIL BROWN is the former editor of the Explorer and is the magazine's opinion columnist.

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Warm winter arrivals

BY EDWARD KANZE

PHOTO BY EDWARD KANZE

The first summer on our 18 Adirondack acres, a quarter century ago, Debbie and I had frosts in July and August and every other month. Back then, the old joke about there being two Adirondack seasons, winter and the Fourth of July, hit the nail on the head.

To quote Bob Dylan, "The times they are a-changin.'" Winters are shorter and milder, summers are longer and warmer, and the mammals we see in our yard and in our neighborhood are a-changing, possibly as a result.

The most dramatic shift has been an increase in the number of raccoons. A decade or so ago, I kept a trail camera trained on our compost pile. While I captured plenty of images of fishers and foxes, I documented a raccoon rarely. Away from the compost, we went years between sightings.

Then came a shift. In the last few years, raccoons have grown to be a daily presence. My friend Charlotte Demers, renowned Adirondack mammalogist and former research scientist at the Adirondack Ecological Center, tells me she's observed the same sort of increase in raccoons around Newcomb.

We keep pet ducks in our yard and Quack House, so raccoons are a worry. Fierce and merciless predators of small animals, they make management of our flock more difficult than it used to be.

In the naivete of youth, I thought of raccoons as cute and friendly until a man who was moving West donated a pet crow to a Hudson Valley nature center where I was working. On its third night with us, the crow, inhabiting an outdoor cage, must have dozed too close to the chicken wire.

Raccoons left behind bits of incriminating hair as they grabbed that poor crow and pulled it through the wire one bloody piece at a time.

Raccoons don't hibernate, and since they function poorly in deep snow and extreme cold, they're forced to hole up in tree-hollows and other nooks during the heart of the Adirondack winter.

They may sleep, at least mostly, for months, stirring on warm days but generally waiting out the season. This lack of winter hardiness probably limited their abundance in the region in the past to warmer valleys and the periphery.

At our place, where we used to see nights of 40 below zero, and snow would pile up so high from shoveling it off the roof we had to chop through the piles to let light in and see out, raccoons were scarce. But winters haven't been like that lately. Our new climate, it seems, has become raccoon-friendly.

Or not. Trends are always tricky to interpret informally. My biologist friend Bob Inslerman, who lives between Lake Clear and Paul Smiths and is in the woods a great deal, tells me he's seen no increase in raccoons. But he has noticed dramatic changes in the arrival time and duration of snow and ice.

The most notable mammal development in our neighborhood, which became clear just this year, is the arrival of North America's lone marsupial, the Virginia opossum.

I'd been expecting them for years, knowing they live on the far side of Whiteface Mountain in Wilmington and in the Champlain and St. Lawrence valleys.

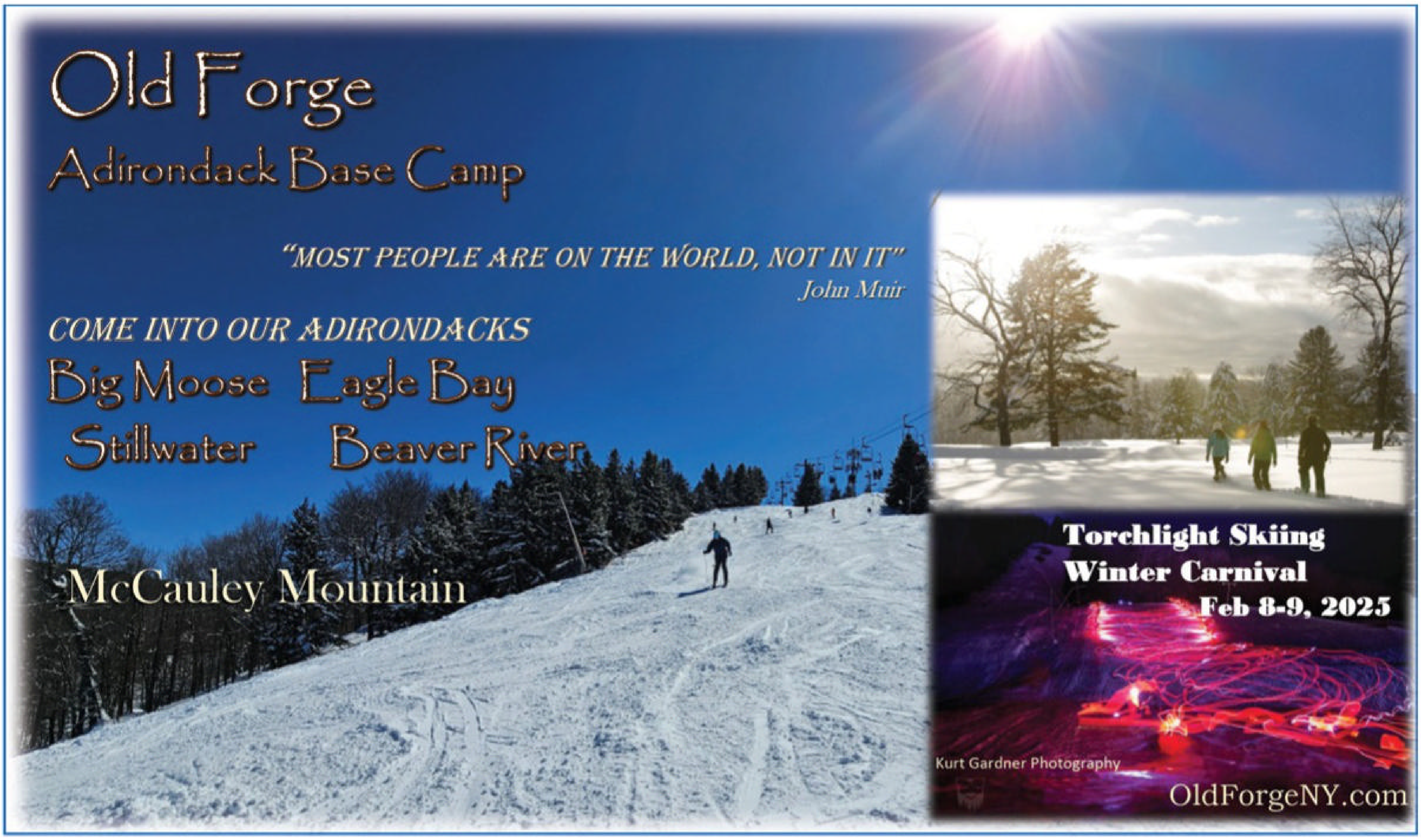
The first hint that possums were here came when our neighbor Susan Nolde noticed earthworm-rich mammal scats in the yard, of a kind left by possums. Susan had never seen anything like them. I loaned her a trail camera, but the scat-maker never returned.

A few weeks ago, my wife was driving home from work and spied a possum waddling across the road about a half mile from our house. Two days later, a possum, perhaps the same one, lay dead nearby.

The environmental impact of the new arrivals remains to be seen. Raccoons and possums are notorious for killing poultry and getting into spaces we'd rather keep to ourselves. On the bright side, possums have been found to consume ticks.

If the changing climate brings us more of these potentially disease-bearing arachnids, perhaps the possum will find a warm welcome. ■

EDWARD KANZE writes about the natural world for the Explorer.



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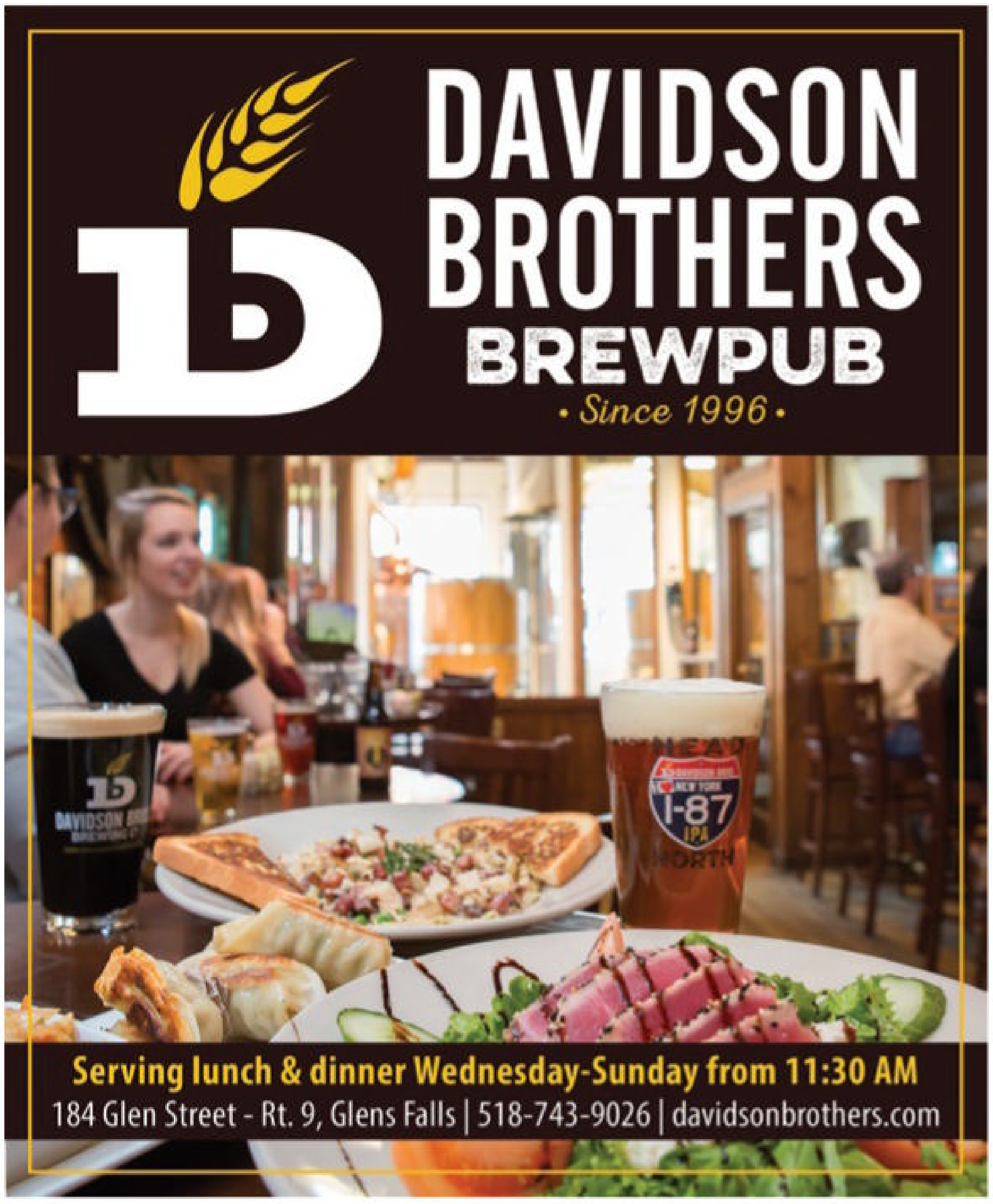

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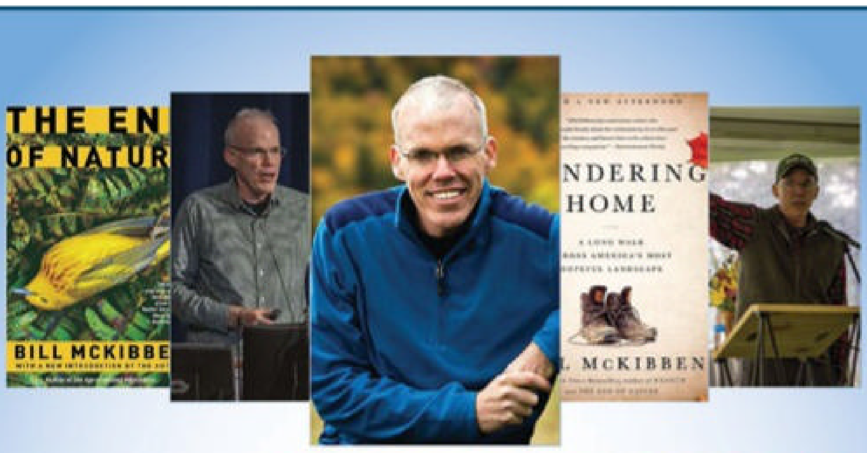

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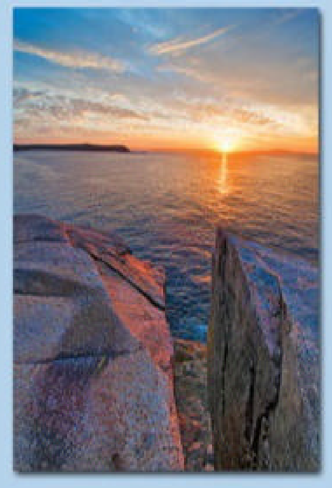

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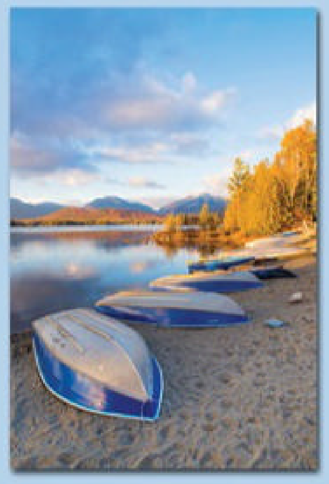

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A cone-seeker with an odd bill

BY JOAN COLLINS

There are six “crossbill” species—finches with mandibles (lower part of their bill) that cross either to the left or right. Two, white-winged crossbill and red crossbill, breed in the Adirondacks.

With an excellent red spruce cone crop in the Adirondacks, red crossbills nested during late summer of 2024. Watch for late winter nesting in 2025.

Crossbills are social and nomadic, wandering, sometimes across continents, searching for conifer seeds that unpredictably produce cones. It is a mystery how they know where to find these good feeding areas. They nest any time if they can find sufficient cone seed crops to feed their young.

Red crossbills are absent from the Adirondacks when all conifer species simultaneously cycle with poor cone crops. Their habitat is in lowland to submontane mature coniferous forest in the northern hemisphere.

In North America, the 11 known “types” of red crossbills are differentiated by their calls. Although they breed mostly within their own call type, there are complicating factors in splitting them into separate species since they often overlap in breeding ranges. In the Adirondacks we have a red crossbill with a call type recently named type 12, but types one, two and 10 can occur, and in some years types three and four can show up.

Red crossbill, a medium-sized finch, has black eyes, legs, toes and claws. Males are deep brick red to reddish yellow. They have dark brown flight feathers and a short, deeply notched dark brown tail. Females are olive to grayish with greenish or greenish-yellow breast and rump. Juveniles are heavily streaked dark brown.

The mandibles cross at the tip of the bill with 50% crossing to the right and 50% to the left. (For white-winged crossbill, 75% of mandibles cross to the right and 25% to the left.) It takes a month for fledglings’ bills to cross. The biological mechanism is yet another mystery.

In the Adirondacks, red crossbills feed on seeds of red, white and black spruces, balsam fir, eastern hemlock, tamarack, and red and white pines. Availability of water is important as they drink 22% of their body mass per day, even in winter.

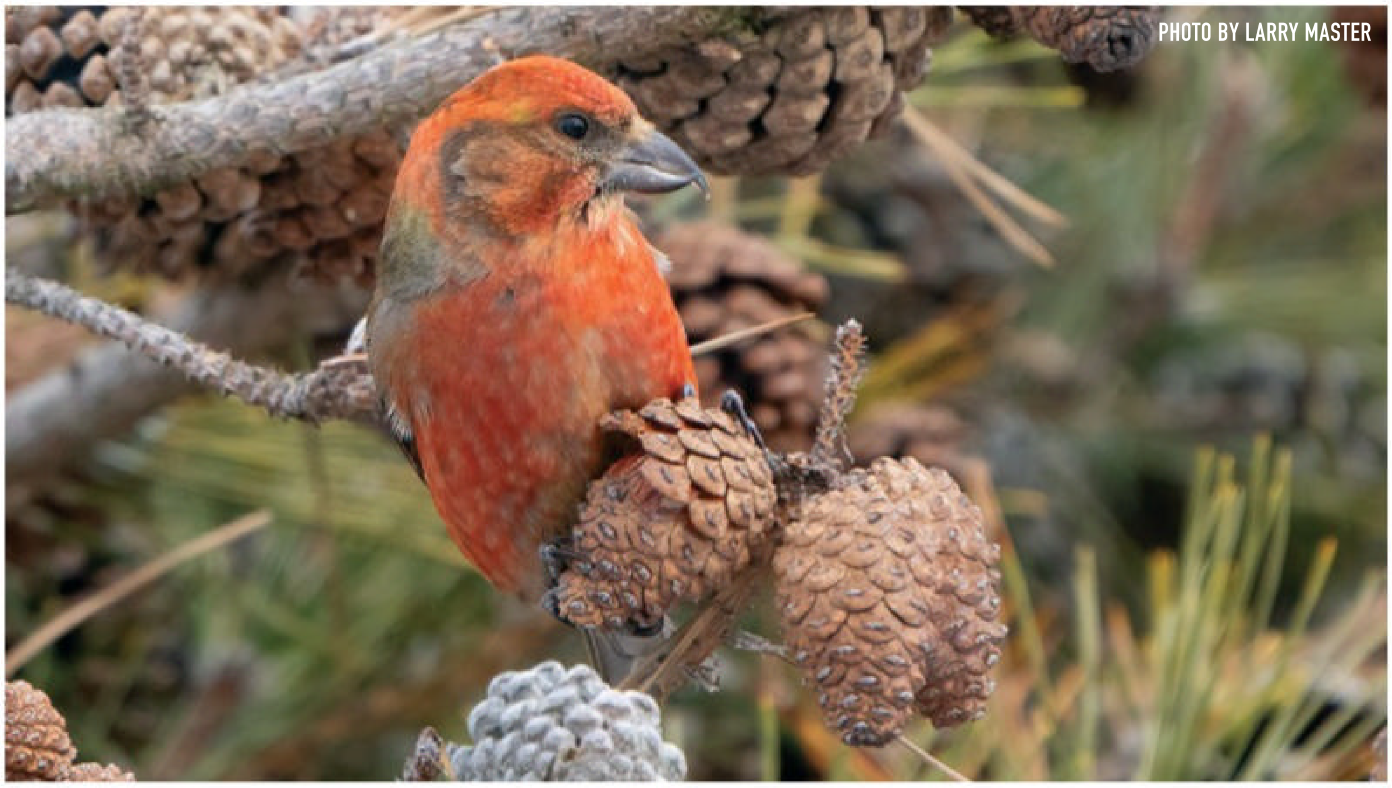


PHOTO BY LARRY MASTER

Their uniquely adapted bill is used to separate the cone scales so their tongue can grab the seed. The bill is held slightly open and the mandible point is placed under a scale, then the crossbill bites down, thereby separating the scales.

They use the foot opposite the side to which the mandible crosses to hold the cone. The woody seed coat is removed before the kernel is eaten. Red crossbills rapidly consume huge numbers of kernels as they acrobatically forage. They use grit to help digest their diet.

Red crossbill songs are varied, but sound like, “pit, pit, tor-r-ree, tor-r-ree” and calls are heavy “whit whit whit” or “jit jit jit.” Males sing from the tops of conifers, making them easy to spot.

Nesting typically occurs in the Adirondacks twice a year when cone crops are plentiful, in mid/late summer and again in late winter/early spring.

Red crossbills can mate by several months old. Mates are selected from within their flock and pairs are monogamous. Males feed their mates during courtship—an interesting behavior to observe with their crossed bills.

In the Adirondacks, they mainly nest in white pines. Breeding is usually colonial with many pairs nesting near one another. Females build the nests and incubate the eggs. The female is fed by the male while she is on the nest.

Nestlings are fed regurgitated seed kernels. Adults continue to feed fledged young until they can extract and shell seeds on their own at about 45 days old.

The U.S. and Canada population of red crossbills declined 12% between 1970-2014 according to Breeding Bird Survey data.

Threats include predation by sharp-shinned hawks, Canada jays, northern shrikes and American kestrels. They die from car strikes when gritting and when red squirrels compete for cones.

Red crossbills need mature coniferous forests. Conifers need to reach 30 years to produce cones, or longer for maximum cone production. Shortened logging rotations limit cone production.

Climate change is resulting in vast numbers of trees dying as a result of insects and increasing wildfires. The warmer temperatures in winter and spring are causing earlier and more complete shedding of seeds from cones increasing the window of scarcity between shed seeds and new seed crops. ■

JOAN COLLINS is a full-time birding guide, writer and lecturer.

Keys to the aurora's aura

BY MIKE LYNCH

Looking into the skies at the aurora borealis we can be treated to a beautiful green glow on the horizon or perhaps an array of colors coming from a more intense storm.

Those colors are a result of a process that starts with electrically charged particles leaving the sun during a solar storm and heading toward Earth. During the storms, hydrogen atoms split into protons and electrons, creating a plasma that can travel through space at speeds reaching more than 2 million miles per hour.

The movement of the plasma is called solar wind. It can penetrate Earth's atmosphere at the northern and southern poles. When it does, those protons and electrons from space interact with gases to create ethereal auroras sought after by photographers and northern lights enthusiasts alike.

So why do we see the colors we do?

The Earth's atmosphere is layered like a cake, and the makeup of those layers determines what colors are visible during auroras.

The greens and sometimes yellow colors that are most common in photos from the Adirondacks are created when those charged particles interact with oxygen at about 75 to 110 miles above the Earth's surface.

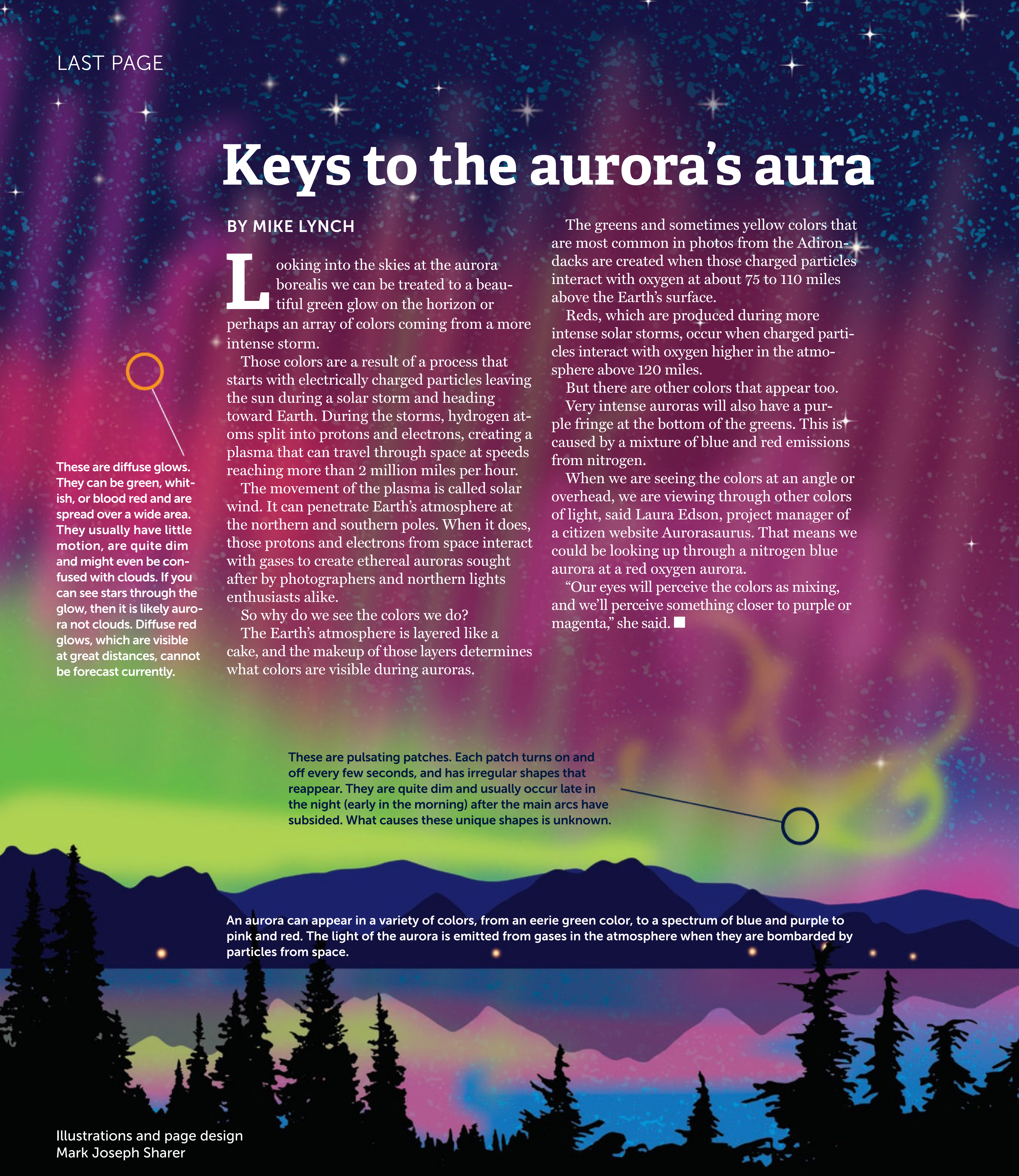
Reds, which are produced during more intense solar storms, occur when charged particles interact with oxygen higher in the atmosphere above 120 miles.

But there are other colors that appear too.

Very intense auroras will also have a purple fringe at the bottom of the greens. This is caused by a mixture of blue and red emissions from nitrogen.

When we are seeing the colors at an angle or overhead, we are viewing through other colors of light, said Laura Edson, project manager of a citizen website Aurorasaurus. That means we could be looking up through a nitrogen blue aurora at a red oxygen aurora.

"Our eyes will perceive the colors as mixing, and we'll perceive something closer to purple or magenta," she said. ■



These are diffuse glows. They can be green, whitish, or blood red and are spread over a wide area. They usually have little motion, are quite dim and might even be confused with clouds. If you can see stars through the glow, then it is likely aurora not clouds. Diffuse red glows, which are visible at great distances, cannot be forecast currently.

These are pulsating patches. Each patch turns on and off every few seconds, and has irregular shapes that reappear. They are quite dim and usually occur late in the night (early in the morning) after the main arcs have subsided. What causes these unique shapes is unknown.

An aurora can appear in a variety of colors, from an eerie green color, to a spectrum of blue and purple to pink and red. The light of the aurora is emitted from gases in the atmosphere when they are bombarded by particles from space.

Illustrations and page design
Mark Joseph Sharer

Source: aurorasaurus.org

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